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THE HISTORY OF A PENITENT.



A

GUIDE FOR THE INQUIRING:

IN A COMMENTARY

ON THE

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH PSALM.

Wm. Washington
BY

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PHILADELPHIA:

HENRY PERKINS, 142 CHESTNUT STREET.

BOSTON: B. PERKINS & Co.

1848.

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TO
JAMES W. ALEXANDER, D. D.,
LONG
MY VALUED FRIEND,
NOW
THE AFFECTIONATE PASTOR
OF
MY VENERABLE, BELOVED MOTHER,
AS
A TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE
FOR
HIS KINDNESS TO HER,
AND
A TOKEN OF PERSONAL ESTEEM,
THESE
PAGES ARE RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED.

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PREFACE.

THIS little book has not been printed, because there is any lack of better treatises, having a similar aim; but, as, when many preachers discourse upon the same text, God often blesses a weaker sermon where a stronger has failed, the author hopes for a like influence sometimes to accompany his pages; and that it may, asks the reader's prayers.

His view of the Psalm, though differing from that taken of it by those Commentators who confine its scope to a believer's experience in affliction, he thinks is justified by the analysis given. His purpose has been, to help the inquiring soul and the young Christian, with counsel taken immediately from the unerring Word. He has, therefore, studied conformity to Scripture, rather than novelty of thought, and plainness more than grace of style; allowing himself a diffuseness, in some cases almost tautological, that, by repeated emphasis, he might impress weighty truths, which a more elegant conciseness would have failed to fix upon the mind. It was a remark of his sainted grand-mother (Mrs. Isabella

Graham), that "those religious writers are the most edifying, who have the most *italics*," alluding to the custom printers then had of distinguishing quotations from the Bible by that type; and it is a fond, but not unwarranted theory of his, that the more Scripture we use aptly, the more inspiration we have. There is a peculiar blessing upon the words, "spoken by holy men of old as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," which does not forsake them, when transferred to the uttered sermon, or the evangelical essay. Hence, every position taken in the following chapters, is backed by cited Scripture; the reference to which is carefully given, that those disposed to the search, may know the place of each text, and ascertain its exact meaning from the connexion in which it stands; a practice fraught with many advantages.

Nothing now remains for him, and his excellent Christian brother, the publisher, but to commit the book, undertaken from an humble desire of usefulness, to the providence of Him, who, as the Head of his Church, is Head over all things, in the hope, that, like bread cast upon the waters, it may be found after many days.

PHILADELPHIA, *December*, 1847.

THE HISTORY OF A PENITENT SOUL.



I.

THE SUBJECT OPENED.

“As in water face answereth to face, so,” saith the Wisdom, “answereth the heart of man to man.” No one man is so like himself, as all men are like each other. There are particular traits to mark the individual, but one true definition of man embraces all men. A man may be inconsistent with himself, but never with human nature. We are all children of the same family. Hence there are two methods of becoming acquainted with ourselves, the study of ourselves, and the study of other men. When Massillon was asked how he, who had lived all his life so secluded from the world, had gotten so nice a knowledge

of human nature, he answered, "By the study of my own heart." Another good man, seeing a criminal carried past to the gallows, cried out, "There, but for the grace of God, go I myself." We may see all men in ourselves, and ourselves in every man.

For this reason, the Bible contains not only doctrine and precept and promise, but also many histories of men, especially of the pious, not hesitating to acquaint us with their errors, as Abraham's lie, Jacob's meanness, David's adultery, and Peter's blasphemy; showing also their chastisements, repentings, and deliverances, that the believer of every age may know that the best saints were sinners, and thus learn to distrust himself because of his weakness, while he trusts in God notwithstanding his weakness, being cautious in his strength, and hopeful in his infirmity. We have one example that is perfect, the life of Jesus in the midst of temptations, to teach us what the believer ought to be; very many that are

faulty, to teach us what we are ever in danger of being; in a word, that our nature is only evil, and that goodness can come only of grace.

Yet we cannot always discover from a man's outward circumstances and conduct, his inner thoughts, and heart-experience, where, indeed, the springs, principles and motives of actions all lie. Man is not what he seems, but what he is within. Wherefore, the Holy Ghost moved holy men of old to write their inner thoughts, and heart-experience, for our learning; and, as they did so under the strong impulse of the Spirit of Truth, which searcheth all things, they have laid bare to our view the man within them, truthfully and without reserve. The Book of Psalms is a most precious and full collection of prayers, meditations and praises, expressive of all the emotions which a believer can feel in this life. This gives them their excellent power and aptitude and sweetness, for while they contain many things besides, especially prophetic revealings of the

Messiah, they supply to believers an inspired manual of devotional thought and language, that we may never be at a loss for words in which to express our emotions, or for rules to guide us in our thoughts.* As they were the liturgy of the Jewish church, so they are of the Christian, a book of Common Prayer and Praise, provided by God himself, in which every sin-troubled, Christ-trusting, heaven-hoping soul, may find his own experience precursed, and the very words that he wants written down for his use. For there is nothing of religion that may not be learned from the Psalms.† It is an open treasury of all good lessons;‡ a paradise in which grow all manner of fruits;§ the fountain waters of salvation flowing through the limbecks of David that we may draw them with joy;|| a clear mirror in which the believer may see his own soul;¶ a living anatomy

* Tertullian.

† Augustine.

‡ Basil.

§ Athanasius.

|| Jeremy Taylor.

¶ Luther. Franck.

of all our spiritual being, by which the Holy Ghost shows us all the exercises of our hearts, our sorrows and griefs, our fears and our doubts, our hopes, cares and anxieties, in a word, whatever agitates and moves us.*

The more a Christian grows in the knowledge of the divine life, the more he loves the Psalms; they are the milk of his infancy, the counsels of his youth, the solaces of his age. In them the Lord his Shepherd leads him to the greenest pastures, the coolest and most quiet waters. While he has this golden book, this epitome of all Scripture,† his table is ever furnished with pleasant food, his cup runs over with the wine of the kingdom, and an excellent oil is poured upon his head. "Is any afflicted?" says the Apostle James, "let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." Prayers and psalms are both supplied in the one book. In them we worship, we pray, and sing

* Calvin.

† *Arma juvenum, parva Biblia, tribulatum solatia.*

with the church of all ages. They have been the songs of every pilgrim, and they will be sung until the new song of heaven shall employ all the tongues of the redeemed.

Among the Psalms there are some more frequently adapted to our meditations than others, because more consonant with our ordinary experience. The cxxxth is one of these. In its brief compass we have a complete history of a penitent's life, nor can we study it to the end without having gone through all the articles of our creed in the order of Christian education, the heart-learning of the truth.

To a meditation on this most admirable compend let me invite you, fellow-sinner, and, (I trust,) fellow-Christian. Let me be to you rather as a companion than a guide. The Scriptures are most perilous to the presumptuous and arrogant. So far from pretending to know all, I have passed over but a very little part of the way in which God leads his people, and that the plainest and

most beaten. Yet, even my little experience may be of some service to another. There may be those who see more in this Scripture than I. All have not the same degree of light. We can give only as God has given us; but that shall be my endeavour. God alone can teach perfectly. Let us ask him to teach us.

THE PRAYER.

O FATHER of lights, shining in the face of thy Son Jesus Christ, give us, according to thy promise, liberally of that wisdom which cometh down from above, that so we may, by thy Holy Spirit, be delivered from all blindness of heart, presumption, and slavish fear. Convince us of our sin and its extreme misery. Reveal unto us, as thou dost not unto the world, the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life, by whom alone we can come unto thee. Grant us grace to serve thee, and wait upon thee at all times with gladness and reverence, ever desiring

the safety of thy presence, and the coming of thy glory; and not only in us, but in all thy people shed abroad thy truth, that we may never more doubt the fullness or the freeness of thy mercy, even unto the perfect redemption by Jesus Christ our Lord. For his sake hear our cry, and let thine ears be attentive to the voice of our supplications. Amen.

THE ORDER.

The order of the Psalmist's thoughts will direct our own.

FIRST: The condition of the penitent.

In "the depths."

SECONDLY: The Helper of the penitent.

"The Lord Jehovah."

THIRDLY: The prayer of the penitent.

A cry, earnest, persevering, expecting.

FOURTHLY: The conviction of the penitent.

"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

FIFTHLY: The faith of the penitent.

“There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

SIXTHLY: The conduct of the penitent.

“I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

SEVENTHLY: The exhortation of the penitent.

“Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy; and with him there is plentiful redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

The first thing I noticed when I stepped
out of the car was the cold air. It was
a sharp contrast to the warm blanket
of the car. I shivered slightly, but
the cold soon faded into a pleasant
surprise. The sun was shining brightly,
and the birds were singing. It was a
beautiful day, and I was lucky to be
out there. I took a deep breath and
smiled. Life was good.

I walked down the path, feeling the
grass under my feet. The air was
fresh and clean. I had never felt
so good before. It was like a new
beginning. I had found a place where
I could be myself. I was free. I
was happy. I was alive. I was
in love. I was in luck. I was
in the right place at the right time.

I had found my home. I had found
my family. I had found my future.
I was ready to start a new life. I
was ready to take on the world. I
was ready to be the best I could be.
I was ready to be a hero. I was
ready to be a legend. I was ready
to be a star. I was ready to be
a champion. I was ready to be a
winner. I was ready to be a champion.

II.

THE PENITENT'S NATURAL CONDITION.

“OUT of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.”

“The depths.” He cries as from a miry gulf into which he sinks, and must be swallowed up if no help come. This figure is frequent in the Psalms. Thus: “Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul” (Psalm lxix. 1, 2.). “I sink in the deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. . . . Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up. Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me”

(Psalm lxix. 15.). "Mine iniquities are gone over my head, as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me" (Psalm xxxviii. 4.). "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Psalm xlii. 8.). In another place he speaks of his "Spirit being overwhelmed within him" (Psalm cxlii. 3.); and, again, he gives thanks unto God, because he had "brought him up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set his feet upon a rock, and established his goings" (Psalm xl. 2.). Here are defilement, danger, and helplessness. Such is the sense which the true penitent has of his natural condition, because the Holy Spirit shows to him his sins, his guiltiness, and his corruption.

His sins.—The first work of the Holy Ghost in turning the sinner unto God, is to "convince him of sin" (John xvi. 8.). Left to himself the sinner is a fool, thoughtless, inconsiderate, and misjudging (Psalm xcii. 6.). He shuts out God from his thoughts (Psalm xiv. 1.). "There is no fear of God before his eyes" (Psalm xxxvi. 1.).

“He flattereth himself in his own eyes” (Psalm xxxvi. 2.). He tries himself only by his own notions, the conduct of his fellow men, or the rules of the world (2 Cor. x. 12.). If he thinks of the law of God at all, it is with a very partial and dim perception of its spirit and extent (Rom. vii. 9.). He fancies that it may be kept without an entire surrender of his heart (Matt. xix. 20, 21.), and he readily excuses himself for any transgression, calling his sins little sins, and is at his ease, saying, I have done no evil (Prov. xxx. 20.). If he would but honestly consider the character of God (Job xxii. 15.), the perfection of his law (Psalm cxix. 96.), and his own inner heart, he could not fail to be convinced of sin (Rom. vii. 9.); but inconsideration is ever the effect of sin (Isaiah i. 3.). He will not think, will not look into the mirror of the law of liberty (James i. 22-25.). He shuns retirement and solitude, that in the whirl of gaiety, or the pursuit of wealth, honour or carnal knowledge, he may hide himself from him-

self (Matt. xiii. 22.). He is in a constant delirium, which if not broken by power from on high, will go with him to his grave (Eccles. ix. 3.).

The blessed Spirit, intent upon the sinner's salvation, by various means, as affliction, an unusual providence, a sick bed, or a startling sermon, perhaps a text of Scripture, a page in a good book, or a pious friend's advice, compels him to think. Then He brings before the sinner's soul the holy majesty of God. With the grandeur of the Creator, He abashes the sinful creature into the dust; with the purity of the Divine character, He discovers the utter imperfection of any human righteousness; with the goodness of the Almighty Giver, He condemns as base ingratitude the sin of forgetting him; with the sternness of his justice, the scrutiny of his omniscience, the irresistibleness of his power, He takes away all hope of paltering with him, eluding him, or resisting him. God reveals himself as a consuming fire.

He applies to the conscience of the sinner the

holy law of God: First, in its vast scope and all-engrossing demands. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;" "and thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark xii. 29, 30, 31.). Who can stand this test? Who has loved God with all his affections, and with all his faculties, and with all his understanding, and with all his energies? Who has meted to his neighbour as he would have his neighbour mete to him again? Then, the law is applied in its particulars. The sinner sees his sins against God immediately, his idolatry of the creature, his unspiritual notions of religion, his profanation of God's name, his breaches of the Sabbath, his neglect of Divine worship; and his sins against God as committed against his fellow men, his violation of social duties, his hatred and lust of revenge, his impurities of thought and overt act, his grasping after undue gain, his uncandid concealments, slanders, tale-bearings or untruths, his covetous envyings or

jealous rivalries. Instances of some or all these sins rise to his remembrance, especially the besetting sins, to which from temperament, or circumstances, or habit, he is peculiarly subject. All his dreams of righteousness are now dissipated. He can see no good in himself. There is no soundness in him. The tremendous penalty of the law against him who breaks even the least of God's commandments, the sentence of eternal death, the fiery wrath of God for ever, shows him God's estimate of his sins. He feels the wrath of God abiding on him.

Then the Holy Spirit reveals the *holy mercy of God*; his provision of grace, but his refusal to save except by the righteousness of his own Son; his giving that Son to die in the sinner's stead, but his infliction upon the Surety of the full weight of our chastisement; his readiness to justify, but his justification of none who do not submit themselves to the rule of Christ; his delight in pardoning, yet never pardoning when the sanctifying

Spirit is resisted and quenched. Yes! the keenest pangs of repentance are shot through the soul from the cross of Christ, the sinless Sufferer, for the sinner's transgressions; the bitterness of his agonies awaken the penitent's bitterest sorrows; and in the bloody sweat he sees the crushing weight of that punishment which he deserves. He reproaches himself as without excuse, as utterly ungrateful and base for having so long despised the love of the Father who gave his Son, the love of the Son who gave his life, and the love of the Spirit by whom the good news, so long neglected, was brought to his soul.

Thus is he in the depths because of his sins. He bemoans himself as very sinful. None could be more sinful, he thinks, than himself. He knows so much more of his own heart than the hearts of others, that he accounts himself the very chiefest of sinners. He thinks of the height of God's holiness, and then he sees how deeply he has sunk, how very far gone from righteous-

ness he is. He feels that every precept of the law sinks him deeper and deeper. Even the love of Christ reveals how utterly vile he must have been to need such a Saviour, and because he has neglected that Saviour so long, he fears that he may have sunk too low even for mercy. He cries unto the Lord from the very depths of his soul, because from the depths of sin.

His guiltiness. The sinner untaught by the Holy Ghost, though he may be warned of God's just wrath against sin, and of the eternal doom he has pronounced against the sinner, can never be brought to see his desert of such punishment. He yet will fancy that God is such another as himself, and will not be so unrelenting or exacting, as to send a soul away into eternal misery for such trifling transgressions. But the Holy Spirit convinces him of his guilt by the same method.

The penitent acknowledges that God is right. The Holy One has threatened eternal death, and it must be the sinner's due. The merciful, the good,

and the loving God, has threatened eternal death; and what must be the guiltiness of sin which wrung such a sentence from His lips who commanded life? Sin committed against One so infinitely worthy of all adoration, love, and service; committed too by the creature he made, with the strength he gave, while he held the sinner up and blessed him with bounty, set his statutes as guides before his feet, and invited him to favour, peace and honour; such sin, by such a creature, against such a Lord, must be guilty beyond measurement or thought.

It is not one commandment, but many, that the penitent has broken, and that not once but often, nay, continually; and yet how wise are those commandments, and how kind the care that revealed them! How just that we should so serve God! How admirably adapted to secure our present and eternal happiness! How necessary to the order of the Divine government, and to peace on earth! What an incalculable train of good may be pre-

vented by our transgression? What an incalculable train of evil may be laid by the same transgression! How certainly will the corruption that sin has wrought in our natures, urge us on to the constant and perpetual accumulation of fresh guilt! Thus does the penitent ratify God's sentence against himself, and acknowledge himself in the lowest depths of guilt.

But all remaining doubt of his deserving that fearful penalty which God has pronounced upon the sinner, must be taken away when he looks upon Christ and his atoning work. Then he beholds the very advocate, the devoted friend, the Saviour of the sinner, bowing his vicarious head in lowly acknowledgment, that "the wages of sin is death." Jesus never pleads for the sinner's pardon, except upon the ground of his own obedience even unto the death of the cross. He never offers salvation, except to those who accept his sacrifice as due to justice for them. He, after all his sufferings, abandons to fiery wrath the soul

that will not repent. None can escape who do not acknowledge themselves guilty as God declares them to be. O what depths of guilt are those to which Christ stooped for the sinner's rescue! How much deeper is that impenitent hardness of heart, which even the mercy of Christ will not reach!

His corruption.—The sinner in his blindness, even though he may have some occasional pangs of conscience, and dread of God's wrath against him as a sinner, is yet fond of denying that he is altogether corrupt. His sins, he persuades himself, are induced by the force of circumstances, the suddenness, the subtlety, or the strength of temptation; and though at times he makes the weakness of human nature an excuse, he yet believes that, if he chose, he has strength enough to resist temptation and lead a good life, as if his sins were occasional, but his moral strength sound at the heart.

The true penitent deplores the corruption of his whole nature. He mourns his overt acts of sin

chiefly because they indicate the absence of good principle within. It is the departure of his heart from God, that excites his deepest contrition. He proposes, he endeavours to live holily and godly, but in vain. There is a constant flow of evil from within him. Nothing comes from his heart but sin. He "must be born again," his nature must be entirely renewed, he must have strength from on high, or he will sink deeper and deeper in the mire "where there is no standing." There can be no salvation for him, if he be not saved from his sins by a higher power.

This he feels the more, the more he considers the character of God. How shall he, all polluted as he is, dare to offer himself as God's servant? How utterly incompetent he is to render an obedience fit to appear in the Divine sight, which looks in upon the heart and takes account of every thought and every motive? He cries out with David unto the Lord: "I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. Against

thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm li. 3-5.). And his petition is nothing less than, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm li. 10, 11.).

The purity and breadth of God's commandments destroy all hope of his ever being able to keep them by his own strength; and yet he knows that he ought to keep them. He desires earnestly to keep them; but in the most zealous attempt, he discovers his utter weakness. He can be satisfied with nothing less than the perfect holiness which they require, and that perfect holiness is in strong contrast to his halting, stumbling, broken endeavours. Like one in quicksand or deep mire, his strugglings to get free seem but to sink him deeper.

Nay, the very salvation which is in Christ Jesus, until he is able to grasp it for his rescue, presses him down. For the gospel is preached to "the lost." It declares that, "when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. v. 6.); that, by the law no flesh living can be justified (Rom. iii. 20.); that, we are all by nature dead in trespasses and sins; that none can be saved, except they be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. vi. 11.). How entire must be the corruption of that nature which cannot be cleansed by any less means than the priceless blood of Jesus! How impotent for good when it is dead in trespasses and sins! How utterly dependent upon Divine grace, when only the creating energy of the Almighty Spirit can give it any life or strength! Thus the penitent cries unto the Lord out of the depths of his corruption, hopeless of deliverance by his own efforts, those very efforts increasing his fears.

These are the depths out of which the penitent cries unto God.

In this "horrible pit and miry clay" are we all plunged by our sins, guilt, and corruption; but, though all must pass through the slough, some are involved in it more deeply and longer than others.

Those who have been early and well instructed in Christian doctrine, when, by the merciful severity of God, they are cast into these depths, know what such distress means. They know the way of deliverance. They are not so startled as if it were altogether new to them. The Scriptures, in their memory, come to their help. They answer their own cry, "What must I do to be saved?" out of the gospel. The unhappy soul, whom no kind parent, nor pious teacher, has instructed in the way of life, or who has shut his ears against all instruction, is confounded by the utter and terrible novelty of his condition, and despairs of help because he knows not of any.

Those who have long sinned against light, and resisted the striving of the Spirit of God, or have given themselves up to degrading pollutions or blasphemous impiety, are usually made to feel these horrors of conscience the more severely. They are really more vile, more guilty, more polluted. Their pride, which was so obstinate, must be thoroughly broken, their corruption more severely chastised, that in their future life they may walk more humbly, more dependently, more cautiously. As they have more pollution to be burned away, the fire that cleanses them must be fiercer and burn longer.

Those who at once believe wholly upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and accept the new heart from God's Spirit by a simple faith, as did the gaoler at Philippi, like him at once receive deliverance. But the sinner, who, though partly persuaded of his sins, yet clings to some hope of deliverance by his own strength, or proposes to himself some reformation before he comes to Christ; in a word,

is not willing to trust Christ and his Spirit for all that he needs, or so doubts the simple gospel, that he dreams of some unusual method of deliverance and assurance, will be plunged again and again deeper and deeper in the miry depths, until, his heart being empty of all hope besides, the hope in Christ enters and reigns alone, that Christ may have all the glory of being all in all.

Although these depths of distress are always found at the beginning of a penitent's life, it by no means follows, that, having been once delivered, he may not fall into them again, and even many times. For the penitent, even after having been brought unto faith in Christ, is still a sinner, compassed about with a body of sin and death, until he reaches heaven. He is upheld by Divine grace alone.

If, therefore, he become careless of his walk, negligent of the means of grace, above all of secret prayer and the study of God's own word; if he omit known duties, and allow himself to commit

known sins; if he be covetous of the world's goods, which is idolatry; or fond of the world's pleasures, which is folly; or aim at the world's applause, which is enmity against God; if he be uncharitable in his judgment of his brethren, harsh or unforgiving, unwilling to bestow upon another's need; then does God in his fatherly discipline, take away from him the joys of his salvation, and the upholding of his free Spirit. He causes him again to see the "hole of the pit from whence he was digged," the sin, the guilt, and the corruption of his nature, that afterwards he may remember he is nothing in himself, and keep low at the throne of grace "that he may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

If, though zealously active in all the outward duties of religion, and especially in advancing the cause of God, he yet presumes upon his own strength, and relies upon means and instruments, forgetful of the ever necessary though unseen help of the Spirit of God, which alone is efficient, then

does God take away that Spirit, that he may discover in the darkness, the beauty of the light; in his prostration, the need of Divine upholding; in his errors, that God's guidance is best; in his failures, that God only can give the increase.

There are also some moral temperaments that need repeated and severe checks and chastisements, but when disciplined become most serviceable to the church. Thus the strong sinner is often converted into the stronger saint. How often was Jacob scourged to cure him of his worldliness! How lowly and cautiously David walked after he had been permitted to fall into sin, and to struggle in these depths! He was very dear to God, but how often do we find him in the deep waters! Compare Peter in his epistles, the sufferer, meek, patient, and relying only upon God, with the heady, rash, and self-confident Peter we find in the gospels! Paul, too, how he cries out at times in the depths of his distresses, distresses almost as deep as his darkness

before Ananias found him! The steel that takes the keenest edge must be held closest to the stone. The hardest wood makes by long attrition the most polished shaft. God uses keen and polished weapons. The brightest martyrs come through the whitest flames.

Would we, therefore, escape from the depths? Let us trust Christ at once, wholly, and at all times. Let us ever walk softly and humbly. Let us give up ourselves entirely to his will, and find all our life in living by him, with him, for him, and to him.

Be not, my fellow sinners, cast into despair, because you are in such depths. Say not to yourself, that there never was so vile a sinner saved. You are, indeed, vile, and guilty, and corrupt. But out of the miry gulfs in which you now struggle, God has raised up every ransomed saint now in glory, and every zealous believer upon earth. David, and Peter, and Paul, and Mary Magdalene, all those whose names are sweetest to us in the

book of our comfort, were once in this miry pit. Yet they cried, and the Lord heard them, and set their feet upon a rock, and put a new song into their mouths, even salvation unto God.

These distresses are the evidences of God's pity and readiness to save. The hardened sinner from whom the gospel is hidden, that he may perish in his iniquity, knows them not. His ears are heavy, he cannot hear; his eyes are blinded, he cannot see; his heart is fat, he cannot feel. He is at ease. He says in his heart, I shall never be moved. But it is because God has opened your ears, that you hear the terrible thunderings of the law; because he has opened your eyes, that you see the darkness and desolation of your natural state; because he has given you a heart to understand, that you feel yourself sinking in deep waters. Even now when you cry unto him, you have proof that you are not utterly submerged. You are not without hope, else you would not cry. O sorrowful soul, these sorrows are God's purposes. He strips you

to poverty, and overwhelms you with distress, that you may come from the far country, think of your Father's house, and return to his love. Think not yourself forsaken because you are cast down. Remember there was One who plunged himself in deeper depths of agony that he might be mighty to save. Are you sick? he is an Almighty Physician. Are you guilty? his atonement is infinite. Are you lost? such he came to save.

Neither faint, doubting one, because you are in darkness and see no light, or because in your afflictions all God's waves and billows seem to have gone over you. There has been a "needs be" for the manifold trials through which you are in bitterness (1 Peter i. 4.). Only return unto the Lord. Seize the merciful promise stretched out for your help. Call upon God from the depths. The depths of his love are deeper still. Call aloud in faith, and the cry shall reach his ears. Where the prayer of faith is, God is. He

heard Jonah from the bottom of the sea. When Peter was sinking in the waves, He lifted him up. Nay, there is not a saint of his He has not raised from death itself.

There is no hope in the Scriptures for those who have no sense of sin. Their hardness only argues their impiety, their atheistical doubts of God's purity and justice, their rejection of Christ, and their desertion by the Spirit. Christ came to save sinners, those who feel themselves sinners; the lost, those who feel themselves lost. All his saints of old, all his true people have confessed themselves sinners, sinners altogether, except as they are sanctified by grace. None ever reached heaven, who did not begin in the depths to struggle on to life.

The history of the world is a subject of great interest and importance. It is a subject which has attracted the attention of men of all ages and of all nations. The history of the world is a subject which has been the subject of many different theories and opinions. Some have thought of it as a series of events, while others have thought of it as a process. Some have thought of it as a story, while others have thought of it as a science. The history of the world is a subject which has been the subject of many different theories and opinions. Some have thought of it as a series of events, while others have thought of it as a process. Some have thought of it as a story, while others have thought of it as a science. The history of the world is a subject which has been the subject of many different theories and opinions. Some have thought of it as a series of events, while others have thought of it as a process. Some have thought of it as a story, while others have thought of it as a science.

III.

THE HELPER OF THE PENITENT, GOD.

THE Apostle speaking to the Corinthians of their distress on account of those sins for which he had rebuked them in his first epistle, says: "I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, (*original*, according to God,) that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow, (i. e. according to God,) worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For, behold, this same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it

wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge" (2 Cor. i. 9, 10, 11.). Here the doctrine is most clearly laid down, that repentance avails for the conversion and salvation of the sinner, only so far as it is godly, or according to God. If our repentance be excited and maintained by motives derived from the character of God and our responsibility to him, it is genuine, and will produce fruit in the careful reformation of our hearts and lives; but, if, on the contrary, it has been occasioned by such considerations as the world presents, it is in itself sinful, and can never produce holy results. Sin consists in a departure from God, a forgetfulness of God, or, when the thought of God is forced upon the soul, an enmity against God. The impenitent man rules his conduct by his own selfish inclinations, the opinions of men, the rewards or the penalties which the world proposes. He may think that he

believes in God, and consider the assertion that he does not, an insult to his moral sense. But it is nevertheless true, that the God of the Bible has no paramount control over his heart and purposes, neither does he make God's law, because it is God's law, the sole rule of his life. He does not know the nature, the extent, or the guilt of his sins, because he will not consider the character of that Being against whom he has offended. Therefore, the Holy Ghost, as we have already seen, brings powerfully and convincingly before his soul the holy attributes of God, by his law, his gospel, and his judgments. The sinner now sees, that his great sin, the root of all his errors and his faults, is ungodliness; and that the great guilt of his sin arises from his disobedience to God, whose authority over him is so rightful and absolute, whose laws ordained for him are so holy and so just, whose goodness toward him is so tender and infinite.

Hence the true penitent, as in our psalm, makes

confession of his sins unto God, acknowledges his guilt unto God, and cries out from the depth of his distresses unto God. Those, who have no personal experience of it, wonder, and often scoff at the deep anguish of the penitent. So different is his estimation of sin and of his own sinfulness from theirs, that they consider him under a melancholy delusion. They can discern nothing in his conduct which should excite such bitter self-crimination, such awful apprehensions of Divine wrath. But could they see God as the sinner, whose eyes have been opened, sees Him, as they will see Him in eternity and at the judgment, they would wonder and scoff no more; they also would tremble before the majesty of the Holy One, and abhor themselves as impious and base and ungrateful. The power of the Holy Spirit brings God so nigh, and renders conscience so quick and intelligent, that the penitent's soul stands naked and abashed before God as though the judgment hour were already come. He is thus shut up

unto God. Nothing is between him and God. Nowhere can he escape from God.

None, therefore, but God can be the helper of the penitent. God only can understand his distresses. He cannot reveal them to any creature. Language cannot express them. No finite mind could comprehend them. There are even natural griefs whose bitterness none can know but the sufferer, and in which we feel the utter insufficiency of any human sympathy; agonies with which we must wrestle in silence; inward condemnations which we would not, if we could, confide to any mortal ear. But there is no grief like that of the soul mourning for sin, no agony like that produced by a sense of God's displeasure, no self-condemnation like that the sinner pronounces upon his soul, when he sees and feels the force of the Divine law. It is this grief, this agony, this self-condemnation, unmitigated by mercy, that make the hell of the lost. God does understand them. His holy eye pierces into the depths of conscience.

He who made the conscience, and now compels its distress, must understand its anguish.

The penitent does not make confession unto God as though God did not already know all that he is, and all that he suffers. It is the conviction that God does know, yes, that He knows him far better than he knows himself, which makes him cry out in his discovered shame and helplessness. If there can yet be any help, it must come from God, for he alone, who knows the extremity, can apply the cure. It is vain to offer a soul in such a case any creature as a mediator or advocate between him and God. Were that creature never so good, never so holy, never so high, he could not understand the distresses for which he would ask relief, nor apply any balm to the inner wounds of the heart. God must help, or the sin-burdened soul must perish in the depths.

God alone can pardon his sins. It is against God that they have been committed. It is God's law he has broken. It is God's authority he

has despised. It is God's just wrath he has incurred, and which presses on his soul. He may be conscious of having offended his fellow men, but he mourns such offences most, because God, the Father of men, had forbidden them. Were the entire world to pronounce his forgiveness, it would not relieve his soul from the weight of God's displeasure, nor silence the accusing law of God, nor discharge him from its penalty. No excuses avail with his conscience; conscience appeals from them to the decision of God. No promises of future amendment comfort him; the future cannot destroy the past. Neither can he hope that God will accept as a servant, such a guilty sinner as he has been. Nor, if he might gather hope from a future obedience, can he see any strength in himself to render it. If there be any hope, it must be in God. Except God pardon and remit, he must perish. None can take him out of God's hands, and if they be the hands of an angry God, he is lost inextricably, irretriev-

ably. It is vain to bid him think that any creature's merit or sufferings can interpose between his soul and God. No finite righteousness can cover his demerit, no finite suffering can expiate his guilt. If there be a way of atonement and escape, God must provide it. God must satisfy his own justice, or the sinner cannot be pardoned so long as it is written, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." God alone can raise him up.

The penitent soul craves more than pardon. He is sensible of his deep, abiding corruption. He has fallen so often, and sunk so low; he is so deep in sin, so powerless against temptation, that if left to himself he must sink in the depths. Were all his past sins pardoned, he would sink immediately again into guilt. Besides, he hates his sins, not merely because they expose him to the punishment of them, but because of their own vileness, and ingratitude, and offensiveness to God. He desires to serve God with his whole heart, and his whole life. Nothing short of an entire

holiness can satisfy the longings of his soul, the cravings of his conscience, or the love of his heart for God; yes, the love of his heart for God, for, guilty as he feels himself to be in God's sight, he loves God, loves that very law whose penalties he has incurred, loves that very justice which pronounces vengeance against the sinner. Yet from these sins he is utterly unable to free himself. This holiness he is utterly unable to attain. The more he struggles, the more does he see himself involved, the weaker does he feel himself to be. No creature can help him in such extremity, for what created arm can sustain the soul that cannot sustain itself? God alone, who created him, can re-create him. God alone can set his feet upon a rock, that he may sink no more. The work must be done within him where only God's skill can reach, and God's eye see. Therefore you hear David crying out not only that he has sinned, but that he "was conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity." Not only does he

pray to the Lord: "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities;" but also: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Nay, more, that new heart and right spirit must be maintained: "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me by thy free Spirit" (Psalm li. 1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12.).

Who, then, but God can be the helper of such a soul? Who but God can understand his sorrows and his wants, blot out his iniquities and his sins, or make his nature radically new and holy and strong?

Thus our penitent in the psalm keeps his eye fixed upon God, and addresses God only. Pious critics, fond to discover all they can of the richness of Scripture, point out three names of God by which the Psalmist addresses him, though the poverty of our language renders them all by the one title, Lord: Jehovah, Jah, Adonai. "Out

of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Jehovah.” “Adonai hear my voice. Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” “If thou, Jah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Adonai, who shall stand?” Jah is seldom used in Scripture, and then seems to denote his terrible holiness and majesty: “Sing unto God: sing praises to his name. Extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name Jah” (Psalm lxviii. 4.). Before this holy and terrible God, who shall stand? Jehovah is also a name of majesty, but God’s peculiar name as the God of Israel: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD (Jehovah) our God, is one Lord, (Jehovah)” (Deut. vi. 4.); and in another place: “God spake unto Moses and said unto him, I am the LORD (Jehovah;) and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known unto them” (Exod. vi. 3.). Adonai is best rendered Lord, intimating supremacy in rule, but it is also used with pro-

phetic reference to the Messiah, our blessed and adorable Master Jesus Christ: "(Jehovah) the LORD said unto my Lord (Adonai,) Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psalm cx. 1.). It is, therefore, to God, the God of Israel, God the perfect in holiness, God the Messiah promised, that the Psalmist cries. These names had he to humble himself before as names by which God was known. Were God known to him only as the Lord of holiness, how would he have dared to look up and cry? But God was the covenant God of Israel, God had promised the Adonai, the hope of Israel, and to Jehovah, and Jehovah-Adonai, as well as to Jah-Jehovah, does he call. Here, then, is a glimpse of hope, the hope of mercy in the very name of the God whose wrath he fears. Indeed, had he not proof of his not being utterly abandoned of God, in the fact that he was not utterly overwhelmed, that his head was still above the waters, that he had strength enough to cry left him?

A drowned man cannot cry, but one well nigh drowning may cry lustily for help. A dead man has no voice, his crying is an evidence that he yet lives. Yet he could only live and have strength to cry by God's preserving mercy. The very sense of his depths, is a proof that God yet pities, the cry contains an earnest that it shall be heard.

From all this we may see,

That true repentance is a transaction between the soul and God. The sinner truly awakened to a sense of his sin and guilt, and corruption, will not, cannot seek repose except in God. He may ask advice from God's people, he may be glad to have their prayers, but he stays not with them, neither relies upon them. If he stay away from God, he must perish. He can but perish if he go to him. It is God only that can read his heart. It is God only against whom he has sinned, and who can pardon him. It is God only that can renew the nature, which he once made perfect, but which has now fallen into such depths of cor-

ruption. No help less than almighty can reach his case. Therefore he goes at once unto God, cries unto God, looks unto God. The repentance which drives us not unto God, is "a worldly sorrow, a repentance that needeth to be repented of." There is no true sense of sin, of guilt and corruption in such a soul. But there is hope in such a repentance as drives us to Him, because none but He could awaken it in us. It is He who rouses us from a sinful nature's slumber, calling us to arise from the death of trespasses and sins, that he may give us life.

There is in true repentance a desire to return unto God and his service. The Spirit that convinceth of sin is the Holy Spirit that convinceth of righteousness. No sinner is made to hate sin without at the same time desiring holiness. No sinner is made to feel the misery of departure from God, without a desire to return to God. No sinner ever acquiesced in the justice of God's anger without desiring God's love. Except we have this desire of returning unto God, of enter-

ing his service, and of enjoying his love, we may hate the punishment, but we do not hate sin. There is, indeed, no repentance at all, but only a slavish fear, or an unfruitful remorse. When, however, that longing for God, for strength to do his will, and for a heart to enjoy his love, is felt within us, it is the pulsation of a new and divine life, which none could inspire but God himself. It is the earnest of a perfect redemption, for He, who is the Alpha will be the Omega, the Finisher as well as the Author.

There is, thus, always in true repentance some perception and hope of the Divine mercy. The very names by which God reveals himself unto us, the very law which condemns us, "in the hand of a Mediator" (Gal. iii. 19.); and above all, the cross of Christ, which more than all convinces us of sin, give evidence of mercy even to those in "the depths." When we have in the gospel the three names of the blessed Trinity, the Father who gave his Son, the Son

who gave his life for sinners, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, we cannot truly look unto God and not know him as the God of mercy, of pardon, and redemption. The sinner, occupied and overwhelmed by his sins, may but faintly discern this cheering light; yet even in his depths he feels that he is upheld by some strong arm. Let him look up and he shall see Jesus. Even now Jesus-Adonai, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, is calling to him, as the Master did to Mary, when in the garden she was bowed down, and blinded by her tears. No, sin-stricken soul, all despairing as you say that you are, you would not give up the trembling hope you have in Christ for a thousand worlds. If you did not hope, you would be in utter darkness. O, then, cast yourself wholly upon God. Prove his mercy fully. Lay hold, strongly as a drowning man, upon the hand Christ stretches out, and he will draw you forth, and set your feet upon a rock.

But how vain are their dreams of salvation,

who will not even think upon God? Who shut him out of their thoughts? Who will not allow themselves to be alone with him and with their own conscience? Who will not for themselves search the Scriptures, where only can be found the word of eternal life? How can they expect the mercy of God to find them in the gay world, the busy marts of trade, the haunts and pursuits of worldly men? No, let them, if they would not perish for ever in that death, which they cannot choose at times but fear, "go to their closets, and shut to the door, and pray to their Father who seeth in secret." They may go to church, and talk with pious people, but until they seek to be alone with God, there is little hope of their repentance.

It is only when alone with God, that we are honest to ourselves. The world is full of delusions. The excitement around us renders us more or less insane. Then we compare ourselves with other men, and flatter ourselves

that we are not so bad, because, not worse, perhaps better than they. But in the closet, we are in contrast with God, the holy law applies its stern test to our lives, we anticipate the judgment; and in our terror and agony of shame, we cast ourselves upon the Saviour to hide our faces on his bosom, clinging close to his protecting arms and pitying heart. There is little hope of the sinner who is unwilling to seek God in secret, and escapes from his convictions to the cares or the pleasures of life; but the moment he desires the solitude where God is, he is well-nigh sure to find him and rejoice in the assurance of his love. God loves the low, whispering, sobbing petitions which are meant for his ear alone, and he will answer in a "still small voice," the soul that so speaks to him.

The Christian should remember, also, that grace can be increased only by frequent resort to the secret place, where grace was first sought and found. We cannot maintain a sense of the

Divine presence, except we often shut out every thing which comes between us and God. We must seek Him in our closets, if we would persuade Him to walk with us in the outer world. Prayer, itself, is an abstraction from the invisible and the present, to commune with the invisible and the eternal. He only, who lives much in his closet, has much intercourse with his God, or "conversation in heaven." But the advantages of the closet cease not when we leave it. As the face of Moses shone after he had reached the plain, so will our thoughts retain, for a time at least, the glow of divine beauty which they received from the divine glory; and, as it fades, we must hasten back to illumine them again. Wherefore David says: "Thou art my habitation whereunto I will continually resort" (Psalm lxxi. 3.). He looked upon the communion of God as the home of his soul. In the world he was like a pilgrim; when with God he was anticipating his eternal rest. He might go forth

on his necessary occasions; but soon to return for food, for rest, for safety, for quiet, for that enjoyment which "a stranger intermeddleth not with." As his need was continually recurring, so he continually resorted to the source of its supply.

IV.

THE PRAYER OF THE PENITENT.

WHEN in distress and danger nature prompts us to call for help, and to entreat it from any able to relieve us; therefore, the sinner, who has been made to know the depths of his sin, his guiltiness and corruption, calls unto God, who alone can understand his wants, pardon his sins, and raise him up to new life.

“Out of the depths have I *cried* unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.”

This *crying* of the sinner unto God is, in itself, a gracious sign. It proves that his eyes have

been opened to his true condition; that he no longer dreams of hope from his own or any creature's merits, but humbles himself in submissive dependence before the majestic holiness of God. For the careless soul, having no thought of its guilt and danger, never prays; the self-righteous soul, like the pharisee in the parable, busies itself with preparing some offering of good works, that it may come unto God with thanks for having become better, rather than with prayers for grace to be made so; and the idolatrous or superstitious are fain to rely upon the prayers of others, or the virtue of some outward ceremony. We must be disabused of all such folly, before we can pray unto God as our only helper. So, when we are convinced that all our help is in God, prayers unto him for mercy will take the place of every thing else. There is an end of all cavilling and disputing about the way of salvation, and of all attempts to escape from our convictions into sinful skepticism, or diverting pleasures, or mere forms

of religion which stupify or amuse, but cannot cleanse the conscience. The soul sees only God and itself, and cries unto him heartily from the depths. "Behold he prayeth!" was the evidence which the Holy Ghost gave that Saul of Tarsus had become a penitent. A dead man cannot cry for help. Neither can a soul utterly dead in trespasses and sins, pray.

The prayer of a sinner will be *earnest*, in proportion to his sense of need. One who believes himself to be drowning in deep waters, will cry for help with agonies of strength; while another, who thinks his danger not so imminent, will rather be occupied with endeavours to extricate himself. The soul, awakened by the Spirit of God, allows of nothing in comparison with eternal safety. "What shall I be profited," is its question, "though I should gain the whole world and am lost at last?" Life, with all its pleasures, riches and honours, is but a trifle, an hour, a morning dream, compared with eternity; but to come short

of heaven, to lie down in everlasting burnings, to spend eternity without God's love, and under God's wrath, that is horror unutterable, a fear which swallows up all other fear, a dread which blackens all seeming joy. This danger is imminent, present, extreme. The impenitent soul, if he think of damnation at all, puts it after death in the far and undefined future. The penitent feels, as it were, the wrath of God already abiding upon him. Eternity is begun with him in time, except as life here is the only season for securing the life everlasting. Nay, life is so uncertain, death so near at any moment, that he dares not postpone the repentance which can be exercised only here and now. He is condemned already, and it is a deep sense of actual, present condemnation, that makes him pray with an earnestness which he can have in nothing else.

This sense of the wrath of God is the more distressing, because he desires the love of God above all things. He adores God, he loves the

excellence of his character, his laws, and his grace. The smiles of one so infinitely good and pure, are to him the perfection of happiness. Though God were to give him all things else, if he should yet withhold his love, the penitent would be miserable. His soul thirsts for God, for the living God. As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so pants he after God. He can be satisfied with nothing less than God (Psalm xlii. 1, 2. xvii. 15.).

For the same reason he hates his sins and his corruption, which deprive him of this Divine favour. He longs to be delivered from them; to have the assurance that his iniquity is pardoned (Isaiah xl. 2.), and that the work of his sanctification is begun. He eagerly desires strength, which he has not in himself, to enter upon the Divine service, which he loves for its own sake, for the safety that is in it, and for the rewards that follow it through grace. He is in love with holiness, because he loves God.

Therefore is his prayer earnest. All he fears, all he hopes for, all he hates, all he loves, his whole heart and soul and mind and strength, are in his prayers. Hence the Psalmist says he *cries*. It is the loud, sharp, quick cry of anguish, terror, and extreme need. It is not the composed, formal address, which mere decorum or form presents, such as his who thanked God, in well set terms, that he was not as other men; but a groan, an exclamation, an intense burst of feeling, not studious of words but truth, as the publican's: "Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner!" As his grief increases, his earnestness increases; and as his temptations press, and his sense of danger is more vivid, his ardour burns the more. He must have pardon, he must have cleansing, he must have strength, he must have God, or die. Prayer is his last, his only means of hope. Therefore, he prays with all the strength that he can. There is a low, sweet whisper, (*dulce susurrum*) of prayer, in which the pious soul, full of confidence, breathes

out its love to God, as into the ear of its best, nearest friend; and there is the full, long oration of praise, reverence and admiring delight, in which the spirit, rapt with religious joy, worships like the angels before the throne; but the penitent has not reached this holy calmness, this lofty joy, this deep intelligence. His prayer is crying, and groaning, and tears, and anguish. It is the cry of the perishing, of the well-nigh lost.

The prayer of such a soul will be *persevering*. If his heart be set upon obtaining mercy, he will not cease crying until he obtains it. There is nothing he cares for but mercy, and, therefore, nothing can interrupt his praying, nothing can draw him, much less keep him, away from the feet of God. Prayer is his business, his only work, his whole occupation.

In God alone is his help. To go away from God, to cease praying unto God, is to give himself up in despair; to part with heaven and to sink in the depths to hell: Where can he go for eter-

nal life, if he go away from Jesus? Therefore, he remains at the throne of grace, as a suppliant; he clasps the knees of God; he clings to his last hope; nor will he loosen his hold until God gives him pardon, or drives him away to everlasting death. There are many, who fancy that they have sought for salvation because they have put up a few supplications, spent one or two anxious hours, studied their Bibles for a little while, or attended some religious meetings in hope of comfort; but because they have not at once, or in a few days found the peace of religion, they give over, saying, "It is of no use, our efforts are fruitless;" and turn again to carelessness and sleep. Yet how did they pray? Was it with the intensity of those to whom religion was all? Was it not only in the occasional leisure from worldly pleasures and cares? Was it not as one uses a charm, or a form, rather than with a hearty earnestness? Was it not with an impatience to get through a painful work necessary to escape from danger,

that they might be free to go back to their cares or their enjoyments? Ah! if they had been truly bent upon salvation, truly solicitous to escape from sin and to be renewed unto God, truly determined to be Christians at the sacrifice of all besides, they would never have given over praying, seeking, searching for salvation. It was because they did not give their hearts to prayer, that God did not hear them. He is insulted, not appeased, by such partial seeking. He must have the whole heart, or he will have none of it. He saw that the idols they had loved were still enshrined in their affections, and, therefore, he refused to enter and fill them with his love and presence.

Not so the true penitent. His desire for God is like a thirst, that grows the more painful until satisfied with the water of life. He goes over his petitions over and over again. He uses every variety of argument. He reviews his prayers and searches his heart to see, whether he has not been praying

amiss, or in a wrong spirit. He endeavours to amend his prayers. He prays God to amend them, to teach him how to pray, to give him honesty and intensity of desire. He prays often, seven times a day, all the day, all the night, without ceasing. He will pray all his life, in the hope of getting mercy, if it be but at the moment before he dies; because until he gets mercy, he is miserable from a sense of sin, hopeless from a sense of guilt, and utterly without strength to do God's will.

Such importunity, so far from being offensive to God, is a most gracious sign of his own work in the sinner's heart. Our Lord in the parable of the poor widow and the unjust judge, teaches us that they are God's elect, "who cry unto him both day and night," though often for wise reasons he withholds the blessing for a time. "He spake the parable to the end that men ought always to pray and not faint" (Luke xviii. 1, 7.). You see the same thing in the actual history of the Syro-

Phenician woman, who came to our Lord entreating him to cure her daughter. At first Jesus appeared not to hear her, but she continued to cry, "Lord, help me!" Then he told her that it was not "meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs;" as if she were a dog in comparison with the more favoured children of Israel. Yet even this severe rebuff does not silence her prayers. She knows that unless the Master help, her daughter must perish, and she is willing to receive mercy, even as a dog: "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Had she not persevered, she would never have received the blessing; but hear what the Master thought of her importunity: "Jesus said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matth. xv. 22—28.). None other than the Spirit of God, the "earnest of our inheritance," teaches a sinner thus to pray.

So the penitent in our psalm. How he repeats

and varies his prayer: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice! Let thine ear be attentive to the voice of my supplications!" He has prayed, but he does not give over. He will pray again. Nay, with an earnest boldness, yet deep reverence, he insists upon being heard; he is determined that Jehovah, the Lord, should pay attention to the voice of his supplications. God loves such praying. It shows that the sinner is in earnest; that he values salvation above every thing, and that his hope is in God alone.

Such prayers must be *expecting*. Were there no expectation of help, there would be no prayer. The devils, though they believe in God, do not pray. Lost souls in hell do not pray. They have no hope; and the language of their despair is complaint and accusation of God, and blasphemy, and curses. So it is with a sinner when he feels only his danger and sees only his ruin. It is in vain that you urge a sinner in such extremi-

ty to pray. He tells you he cannot. He cannot assent to the justice of God that condemns him, to the wrath of God that consumes him, to the law of God that witnesses against him. His soul is full of despair and blasphemy. He dare not look up to God. He would fain escape from God altogether.

But when he hears of mercy, of Christ's atonement, intercession and power, though yet he cannot wholly trust the promise, he begins to pray. Faith is not yet manifest in him, but it is already working under his fears and terrors, for he says: "Since there is mercy with God, he may save even me, therefore I will pray; since there are merit and advocacy, and power with Christ, he may perchance apply his grace to my soul, therefore I will pray; since God has commanded me to pray, the very command contains a promise, that if I pray aright I shall be heard." If he pray, it is to God the Hearer of prayer, and through Christ, the Mediator and Intercessor. The very longing for mercy includes some expect-

tation of mercy. His perseverance in praying shows some hope that yet, if not now, his prayer may be heard.

He cannot look to God, or make use of the names of God, or enquire after examples of prayer, without having some intimations of God's pity for the sinner, of his mightiness to save, of the fact that he has saved and does save sinners, and may save him.

God would never have put this spirit of prayer into his heart, or the words of prayer into his mouth, or set Christ before him as an intercessor, only to mock a soul about to perish.

His only anxiety now is, that he may pray aright, with sufficient earnestness for repentance and faith: "O that I might find him! O that I could believe! O that I might see him and come to him, and lay hold of his strength!" Therefore, he prays on, in the hope that while attempting to pray, he may learn to pray indeed. His soul is on the watch, as he says in another verse, "more than they that watch for the morning." It may

be dark now, darker than ever, it is darkest before day, but the day will come, though it seem long first. The shootings of the dawn, the pale light along the eastern horizon, shall yet herald the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. This is more than desire. It is expectation, that grows into hope, and will be consummated in faith.

Whenever, therefore, the penitent heartily resolves to pray until the blessing comes, there is a beginning of trust, that the blessing will come. Despair is past, and the soul is ready for the avowal and petition: "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief" (Mark ix. 23.). Such a petition was never put up in vain.

Let, then, every penitent soul find comfort in prayer. Not because there is any merit in prayer, or that by prayer we can do any thing efficiently to gain God's favour; for our very prayers are mingled with sin, and there is no merit in any thing we can do; but because prayer is the effect of the Holy Spirit's power. It is the Spirit of

adoption, within us; God's gracious messenger sent to open the heart and prepare it for his own indwelling.

Let us, however, be sure that we do indeed pray. Words are not prayer, posture is not prayer; it must come from the heart, from the depths of the heart, from a heart bent upon salvation, a heart that will not give over praying, that cannot be denied; and above all, a heart resting upon Christ's merit, God's promise and the Spirit's help.

Ceasing to pray is a most fatal sign. It is the evidence of death, the certainty of unbelief, the silence of a soul abandoning God, and abandoned by him. There is little hope of such an one ever being awakened again. He has been so far enlightened as to perceive his danger; has felt the inward workings of constraining grace; has been convinced of his desperate need; has looked longingly towards heaven, and trembled at the thought of hell; but, notwithstanding all this light and grace, and conviction, he has suffered himself

to be drawn away by the temptations of the world, the backward drawing of his unbelieving heart, and the delusions of the tempter, from the only refuge of his soul, the only means of attaining safety. What arguments can be used with him, that he has not heard and resisted? What new knowledge can be imparted to him more convincing than that he has abused? It may be that God will rouse him again, but it is nowhere promised that he will; on the contrary, the tenor of Scripture threatens, that the Spirit thus quenched and despised, will leave the sinner alone to perish in his guilt.

The true penitent prays on to the end. If he be not heard, he prays on in the hope of being heard. If heard, he prays on in hope of greater blessings. The more he prays, the more he loves to pray; every answer to his prayer excites within him a more earnest desire. The more his sins press on his conscience, the more he cries for pardon; the more he sees of his weakness and the

extent of the Divine love, the more he cries for strength ; the more he converses with God his Father through his sympathizing Mediator, the more reverently bold he grows. He becomes skilled in petition, appropriates more confidently the Divine promises, and longs the more for the blessedness of beholding God's unveiled face in glory. He learns by sweet experience, that prayer is the ever availing, only availing cure for sin, doubt, sorrow and fear.

—LORD, teach us to pray. Shed abroad in our hearts the spirit of adoption, even the Spirit of thy Son, that like him we may pray without doubt, weariness or cessation, until like him we enter into the joy set before us, and are satisfied with thy likeness perfect in our souls. Thy saints cease to pray in heaven, only because having all, there is nothing left to pray for, and the unceasing shining forth of thy Divine glory absorb all their faculties in adoration. Thy Church on earth is a house of prayer, thy Church above, the house of praise eternal !

V.

THE CONVICTION OF THE PENITENT.

“IF thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O, Lord, who shall stand?”

The penitent from out of the depths of his sin, his guiltiness, and his corruption, being convinced that God alone can help him, because God alone can understand his distressing necessities, pardon his sins, and restore his soul unto a new life, calls unto God with great earnestness, importunate perseverance, and not without expectation of a gracious answer.

The third and fourth verses of our psalm show us the substance of a true penitent's address unto God.

A confessing of utter unworthiness in God's sight :

"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

A pleading for mercy, founded upon *the revelation of forgiveness*, which God has made :

"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

We are now to consider the first.

The penitent confesses his utter unworthiness in the sight of God.

It has here the form of a question, that being a strong natural form of assertion well suited to the speaker's intensity of feeling, and his deep reverence of the Holy Being to whom he speaks. In amazement at the pure holiness of God, he asks : "Who shall stand?" and he refers the question to God the only judge.

It is, besides, difficult to give in another language the exact shade of meaning in the original which is rendered, "mark iniquities." God

does, as his Word every where declares, mark the iniquities of men. He looks "down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there be any that understand, that seek God" (Psalm liii. 2.). The Psalmist says also: "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me". . . . thou "art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Psalm cxxxix. 1, 3, 4.). The Saviour declares, that "every idle word which men shall speak they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. xii. 36.); and the apostle: "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. v. 10.). In the Revelation we are expressly told that in the vision of judgment, "the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their

works" (Rev. xx. 12.). Thus, the omniscient holiness of God does mark, and, as it were, make an account of all our iniquities. It would be an impious and blasphemous error to suppose that He, who says, he "will by no means clear the guilty," would overlook any sin committed against his pure and sovereign authority. The Psalmist, therefore, must mean bringing into strict judgment, and executing vengeance upon, all those who commit iniquities; as if he said: "If thou, Lord, shouldest" deal with us after our sins, or reward us according to our iniquities, "O Lord, who shall stand?"

He is convinced of his utter unworthiness by considering

The Judge who tries—God.

"If *thou*, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities."

And those who are tried: Men, all men, the best men as well as the worst.

"*Who* shall stand?"

God is the Judge by whom he is tried. The sovereign God, his Creator, his Preserver, who

has a right to all his love, his reverence and his service; whom it should be his delight and grateful choice to honour with all his powers, as his supreme and only Master; he it is who requires of him an account of all his life, his thoughts, and words, and deeds; all his time, and talents and energies. If, therefore, he has come short in any of all these, how shall he stand?

It is the holy and the pure God, whose commandments are exceeding broad, and who will not tolerate even the shadow of evil. Who can abide his rigid and unyielding and undeviating justice?

It is the omniscient God, whose eye we can never elude; who searches even the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. v. 12, 13); who cannot be deceived, and from whom nothing can be hidden; so that our whole lives and characters must be certainly and accurately known. Who can endure such a scrutiny?

It is the omnipotent God, whose will is every

where active and every where irresistible; to whom all beings, and all things, and all events are subject; and, therefore, from whose wrathful sentence there is no escape. When the Almighty rouses himself to anger and launches the thunderbolts of his vengeance against sin, who among all his guilty creatures can stand?

It is the eternal God, who remains ever the same, and who ever lives to execute the fierceness of his wrath upon the guilty but immortal soul, that must for ever suffer the inexhaustible penalty. "Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings" (Isa. xxxiii. 14.)?

Thus the penitent considers himself as in the sight of God. It is not of his duties to man that he enquires, but of his duties to God (Psalm li. 4.); all his duty to man being comprehended in his duty to God. While other men find a false comfort in thinking that they have been faithful, and honest, and pure, and temperate, and charitable in

their relations with men, he brings himself immediately before God; and his conscience, enlightened by the Spirit and tried by the Word, pronounces him utterly unworthy and guilty before God.

While other men try themselves by the judgment and practice of the world, and, if they can gain the world's approval of their conduct, are satisfied (2 Cor. x. 12.); he compares himself with God's holiness, and God's law, and can find nothing but condemnation.

While other men, notwithstanding all that God has said (Psalm lxxiii. 11.), will not believe that he is inexorably just, and that he will send the wicked away into everlasting punishment (Matt. xxv. 46.); he acknowledges and trembles before the holy majesty of him with whom he has to do, and confesses himself deserving of that endless wrath (Psalm li. 3, 4.); and the consciousness that he has of sin, confirms his conviction that God "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod.

xxxiv. 7), but that his "wrath burns to the lowest hell" (Deut. xxxii. 2.).

These are the reasons, why the penitent is without hope of justification from himself, while many, far less pure and correct in their outward conduct and inner thoughts, remain with easy consciences, careless and, it may be, confident of the future.

This conviction is deepened when he thinks of those who are tried by this sovereign, holy, omniscient, eternal, and inexorable Judge.

"*Who shall stand?*" All men shall be brought into judgment by God, but who will be able to abide in the judgment? There are gradations in the character of men, some are more wicked than others; but is there one among all our race that, measured by God's law, examined by God's eye, and weighed by God's judgment, can stand?

What say the Scriptures? It "hath concluded all under sin" (Gal. iii. 22.). All are "by nature the children of wrath" (Ephes. ii. 1.). All are children of fallen Adam, fallen in him

(Rom. v. 12.), and dead (by nature) with him (1 Cor. xv. 22.). There is none that, in God's pure sight, "doeth good, no not one" (Rom. iii. 9. 10.).

What say God's best saints? They all humble themselves before God as sinners; all look for salvation only through mercy. The Apostle Paul calls himself the chief of sinners, as would all the rest, from Abel down to the last that shall be born unto God on earth.

Nay, the gospel of Christ insists, that the last vestige of self-righteousness be removed, before grace is promised to the soul. "I am come" saith he, "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;" they "that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matt. ix. 12, 13.). The very first work of his Spirit is to convince men of sin (John xvi. 8.). Indeed, who but a sinner can trust in the Saviour of sinners, all whose people must be sinners, because he comes "to save his people from their sins" (Matt. i. 21.)?

Now, the use which a true penitent makes of this great Scripture doctrine, man's universal sinfulness, is not to comfort himself, as the natural heart does, because he is only one of a crowd of sinners, and perhaps, not so bad as many others; nor to think, that because the depravity is so wide-spread, God will not be so inexorable as to pour out his wrath upon the race. No; he is convinced that the sins of others will not excuse his own, but that he must give an account of himself unto God (Rom. xiv. 12.); and he reads in God's word, that "God will bring every work into judgment" (Eccl. xii. 14.); and that "death hath passed upon all men because that all have sinned" (Rom. v. 12.). He is the more convinced of his own personal unworthiness, for he says in his heart, if patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles and martyrs, cannot stand upon their own merit, how can one so guilty and weak as I? If there is no hope for him as a sinner, he can have none.

From this we learn, as has been shown before, that there is some hope in the penitent's heart, a gleam of light even through this dark cloud of universal sin and guilt.

"If thou, Lord shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" If there be no way for thee, O Lord, but to execute vengeance upon the sinner, who can be saved? Stephen and all the martyrs, Paul and all the apostles, David and all the prophets, Moses and all the patriarchs, must have gone down to everlasting death. There are none, there have been none, there can be none saved. God has no people from among men in earth or in heaven. The whole race is lost, nay, must have been lost from the beginning. But this, the penitent knows, is not so. God has been honoured and served, and trusted in, by many sinful but penitent souls, who have found him to be gracious and merciful; and who have left on record an exhortation for all who are sinners like them, to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

There is now in heaven a mighty host of glorified souls, once sinners like us, singing hallelujahs to the God of mercy and love. Indeed, if God only punishes transgressors, wherefore is it that men are not now driven from the face of all the earth to hell? "Nay," asks the penitent, "how is it that I am spared, that God is so long-suffering with so great a sinner as I am? How is it that He visits me with so many merciful warnings, stirring me up to anxiety for the safety of my soul, drawing me towards himself, making me to love him and desire his love? Surely God does not mock with a false hope the soul he means certainly to destroy; nor would he awaken desires in his creature's heart that cannot be gratified. There must be a provision of mercy, a way of pardon for the sinner, and of salvation for the lost." Thus is he prepared to see the fitness and sufficiency of the gospel by Christ, and to rejoice in that revelation of forgiveness which God himself has made. The character of

God, which at first seemed to overwhelm and consume him, now lightens his darkness, and sustains, nay, lifts up his soul. "Out of the eater comes forth meat: and out of the strong comes forth sweetness" (Judges xiv. 14.).

Thus we see, that except there be self-condemnation, there has been no true approach unto God.

The impenitent, as has been said in another place, remains ignorant of his sinful, guilty and corrupt condition, because he remains afar from God; so, on the contrary, when God by his law, his gospel and his Spirit reveals himself to the sinful soul, it is made, in the pure and holy light of the Divine presence, to see its defilements, which before were hidden in the darkness of ignorance; and the more nearly the penitent is brought unto God, the brighter does the Divine holiness shine; and, therefore, the more plainly and the greater does his defilement appear. If this increased sense of defilement be not felt, it

must be because we have drawn nigh, not to the God of the Bible, but to some imaginary being less holy, less just, and less inexorable, whom our sinful hearts have set up in the place of God. For it is impossible to bring our souls into contrast with the character and will of the true God, without such self condemnation. The oldest and the best Christians, instead of losing this sense of unworthiness, show by their confessions, that it increases with their divine knowledge. Not because they become worse sinners, for we know that the reverse is the fact; but because, by knowing more of God, they know better what sin is, and by knowing more of their own hearts, they know more of the sin that dwelleth in them. Even in heaven, though all sense of then actual defilement is taken away, and with it all the pains of repentance, the glorified saint never forgets that he was a sinner, and that he has been raised to bliss from out of the depths of sin and guilt, and corruption; for, as he casts his crown at the feet that were

nailed on the cross for him, and which still bear the prints of the wounds, his song with all the ransomed host, is: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from all our sins in his own blood."

So far, then, from this being a discouragement to the penitent, he should see that self-condemnation is the forerunner of hope. It is not a conviction of the natural heart; that is ever self-righteous, clinging to supposed virtues, and excusing or palliating manifest faults; but it has been produced by the Spirit of God bringing God nigh to him, and him nigh to God. He sees with more than natural light. God himself has taught him. He is not left to the delusive dreams which he has indulged so long, of his own worthiness or safety. God has not abandoned him, but has shaken him, until he has awakened to find himself in imminent danger of being overwhelmed for ever. This influence of the Spirit is itself mercy. He is not forgotten or given over by the God whom he has offended. God's Spirit, which is the Spirit of

Christ, has already commenced the work of mercy in his heart, for wherever He comes, He convinces of sin (John xvi. 8.). The Spirit is leading him by the same path, which all God's people have trodden, from sin unto holiness, from the depths to glory.

For the same reasons, it is equally clear, that ease of conscience and self-security are most fatal symptoms. Those, who can live under God's authority, with his law in their hands, his gospel sounding in their ears, his eternal judgment before them, and not be convinced of their sin, their need of a Saviour and of a new heart, must truly be in a most stupid slumber, given up to strong delusions, with no true knowledge of God, their own hearts or the way of life. There is in them no preparation for Christ, no hungering after the bread of life, no thirst for the water of salvation, no Spirit voice calling them to repent, believe and live. Awake "thou sleeper, arise, and call upon thy God, if so be that God will

think upon thee, that thou perish not" (Jonah i. 6.)!

Yet worse, if it be possible, is the condition of those, who, having been once partially aroused, and made to cry out for mercy, have relapsed into their former stupidity. They have resisted the Spirit. They have sinned obstinately and against light. They have deliberately turned their back upon God, and Christ, and heaven. They have stupified their consciences by the cares, or the pleasures, or the riches of this world. God may never awaken them in this life again. But awake they shall. For who shall sleep when the trump of the archangel and the voice of God shakes the sleepers in the grave; when driven by flaming swords of cherubim, all nations shall be compelled before the judgment seat, where the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched, shall claim the impenitent for ever! Then, saith the Lord: "Because I called, and ye refused; because I stretched forth my hand,

and no man regarded, but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh" (Prov. i. 24-26.).

O how fearful an anger must mercy turned to indignation be! Men are fond of supposing that the omnipotent, eternal God, will not stoop from his majestic height to punish his sinful creatures; but he has stooped to open for them a way of escape from his own anger, and if they refuse the salvation, his wrath must be the greater. The same book, often the same verse, which offers mercy through Jesus Christ, denounces eternal death upon all who reject the gracious proposal. You must deny the whole Scripture, and especially the gospel, if you would doubt that wrath unto the uttermost will not come upon the impenitent and unbelieving. Oh! awful wrath of holy God! Oh! miserable soul that must endure it for ever! When the great day of His wrath s come, who will be able to stand? Who among

us can resist His furious power (Jer. xxi. 5.)? Who can dwell with devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? We can but very faintly imagine the sufferings of lost souls. All the tortures and pains that mind and body can feel here, are as nothing to the anger of the Lord when it is full. The most terrible images of anguish, gloom and horror, which the Holy Ghost employs to set it forth, are but faint types of that which is unspeakable.

It will be the wrath of Christ, whom God has set forth as the image and representative of his mercy, for Christ will judge the world in his Father's name; the wrath of Him, who hath borne long and patiently with the sinner, that, peradventure, he might repent, but will then bear no longer. What a flood of fiery indignation will the despised Saviour, then the avenging judge, pour out upon them who have heard of his love only to harden themselves in iniquity, and have presumed upon his mercy, defying him to his face; whose hearts

have resisted the tenderness of divine compassion, as well as the warnings of justice? What measure can there be to their suffering, when the Saviour abandons them, nay, turns upon them in vengeance? The very surprise will make his wrath more terrible. Even while they deafen their ears to his calls, and scorn his service, they yet flatter themselves with the hope of salvation from his mercy in the end. They dream that He who pleads with them now, will plead for them then. They cannot believe that He will ever cease to offer them pardon. Our Saviour intimates that some may approach the judgment-seat with hope (Matt. vii. 22.); that, even when they hear the crashing thunders and hissing fires of the curse on every side, as the power of God lashes all the elements to rage, they may turn to the Saviour, and, remembering his former promises and pleadings, invoke his name of love; but when they look up they will see that He is himself the judge; that the lightnings go forth from the fierceness of His counte-

nance ; that the thunder-bolts are thrown by His hands. How will the sinner be abashed and terror-stricken at the change in that once mild, gentle, sorrowful face, and that sweet, sad, pleading voice ! How utter must be his despair, when the hand once nailed on the cross, and so often extended in entreating gesture, warns him away to death everlasting !

It will be "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 16.). The name which the Saviour has from his meekness, patience, gentleness and slowness to wrath. There is no anger so great and unappeasable as that of the good, who have been provoked beyond all endurance. The anger of the capricious and passionate, being quickly hot, is as quickly cold, because it has no reason or slight reason. The anger of the wise and good, is provoked only by grievous insult, and after being long restrained, dammed up, as it were, by a resolute will, until even conscience forces it over all restraints in a sweeping flood. Such will be

the wrath of the Lamb. The sorrows of his life, the bitterness of his passion, the pleadings of his Spirit, bear witness to his forbearance and long-suffering. For many long years He has restrained his indignation; but then he will let it burst forth. Even the meek Lamb will be roused to vengeance. Justice demands that such crime be no longer borne with. The punishment of such sinners becomes a duty to his law and his empire; and the sinner will find that the mercy of Jesus has only aggravated his guilt and eternal woe.

Then there will be no escape. Who can elude God's eye, or break away from his almighty hand? Where shall the sinner flee to get beyond the omnipresence of a pursuing God? What barriers can he raise against his approach? Where can he hide his guilty soul? He may call upon the rocks and hills to hide him; but the rocks and hills are the creatures of God, and will melt in the flame of his terrible presence. Annihilation would

be a refuge; but he cannot put off his immortality, and the pangs of that death are eternal.

Now there is an escape from the wrath of God in his mercy, through the mediation of Jesus; but then there will be no Mediator. "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb. x. 26.). God has no other Son to give, that he may die for those who have despised his only-begotten. There will be no second Bethlehem, no second Calvary, no second Gospel. The Sun of Righteousness will never break the gloom of that eternal light; the Sabbath will never dawn on the darkness of that despair. Hope will for ever abandon the twice lost. The sinner's worst torment will be in his own soul. His memory of the sins he has committed, and the opportunities of mercy he has abused, will feed the unquenchable flame; and remorse, like a venomous worm that never dies, gnaw in upon his soul.

O thou crucified One! give us refuge in thy mercy now from thy vengeance then! Our

fear is upon us now; now do we feel the heaviness of our calamity in having sinned against thee; mock not our prayer; laugh us not to scorn, Thou that sittest in the heavens! Once more stretch out thy hand; call once more, and we will gladly grasp the sceptre of thy love! If thou markest our iniquities, we must perish; but we trust that thou, O Lamb of God, hast borne them for us, and that with thy stripes we may be healed!

VI.

THE FAITH OF THE PENITENT.

“BUT there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

It has been shown from the preceding part of the psalm, and particularly from the third verse, that a true penitent addresses himself unto God with a full conviction of his utter unworthiness. He cannot, therefore, expect any thing from God's goodness, of which he is so undeserving, much less of God's justice, which condemns him. If God mark his iniquities, he cannot stand. His only hope must be, that God will not “mark” his “iniquities,” or, in other words, that he will

forgive them. But what warrant has he to hope that God will forgive his iniquities? God is just; how can he pass by transgression? He has said, that "the wicked shall not be unpunished" (Prov. xi. 21.); how can he pardon the wicked? That "the soul which sinneth shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4. 20.); how may the sinner live? That He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. xxxiv. 7. Num. xiv. 18.); how may the condemned be justified? How can mercy be consistent with justice?

These are questions which mere reason cannot help us to answer. Reason never has answered them; for it seems an utter contradiction to speak of a just mercy, or a merciful justice, mercy being the remission of penalties which justice imposes and ought to exact. The best of the classic moralists, though they applaud clemency and gentleness in a ruler, condemn mercy as a weakness, which, if not a vice in itself, is an encouragement to vice in others. Seneca, indeed,

pronounces it a vice most common to the weakest minds, and says, unhesitatingly, that "no man who deserves to be punished ought to be pardoned, because a ruler, if he be truly wise, does nothing but what it is just to do" (De Clem. ii. 5. 7.). We find, it is true, among the ancient heathen, some notion of mercy from the gods; but, setting aside their very false ideas of deity, and the miserable character of the popular divinities, they sought to avert the anger of heaven by sacrifices and purifications, borrowed by tradition, as we doubt not, from the typical rite of sacrifice instituted by God himself at the gate of Eden. It is also common to hear worldly and impenitent men talking of the mercy of God, as if he were too merciful to punish them for their sins; yet it is easy to see, that theirs is a vague imagination, derived from an imperfect understanding of the mercy of God as made known in the gospel, an ignorance of God's character, and of their own. They hope to escape the severe

punishment threatened against sin, rather because they do not account themselves to deserve it, than because they think God too merciful to give them their deserts.

Where a soul is fully convicted of sin, as we see our penitent to have been, and it is heartily desirous of regaining the favour of the infinitely holy God, no such sophistries or superstitions can satisfy the conscience. Nothing less than an assured revelation of some method by which God may be "a just God and a Saviour" (Is. xlv.), will warrant confidence in him. Thus the apostle in Hebrews, tells us that even the divinely appointed ritual of Levi, could not in itself satisfy the spiritual worshippers; for he says: "those gifts and sacrifices would not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience" (Heb. ix. 9.). It was confidence in "the better hope," which they prefigured, that sealed peace upon the soul of the Jewish believer (Heb. vii. 19.).

The same Holy Spirit which wrought in the sinner's heart, such a deep sense of sin, guilt and pollution, such a sorrow for his iniquities, and such a hatred of his vileness, conducts him to the revelation of mercy made by God himself in the GOSPEL OF JESUS. The soul, driven from every other hope or supposed refuge, is shut up to that only method by which God has declared that he will justify and save sinners.

This gospel is briefly stated by our blessed Lord in his conversation with Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John iii. 14-17.). Here, according to the interpretation

afforded by other scriptures, there are several things stated :

I. It is the merciful desire of God to save sinners: "God so *loved* the world."

II. God has appointed his own only begotten Son as the Saviour of sinners, "that whosoever believeth *in him* might not perish, but have everlasting life."

III. The Son of God became incarnate upon earth to save sinners: "God sent not his Son *into the world* to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

IV. The provision for the salvation of sinners was fully made by the Son of God incarnate upon earth in his righteous life, consummated upon the cross: "As Moses *lifted up the serpent in the wilderness*, even so must the Son of Man *be lifted up*, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

V. The method by which a sinner becomes a partaker of this salvation, is a living faith:

“Whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Thus from the gospel the penitent learns: “There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared.” Here is,

First: The truth believed: “There is forgiveness with thee.”

Secondly: The proper consequence of faith in this truth: “That thou mayest be feared.”

First: The truth believed: “There is forgiveness with thee.”

In contemplating this truth, the penitent considers, the purpose of forgiveness; the method of forgiveness; the application of forgiveness.

The *purpose* of forgiveness. From the beginning of the curse, which God sent upon man because of sin, he has given intimations of his purpose to forgive. The fact that he did not at once consume man with his wrath, but bore with him notwithstanding his sin; the names by which he revealed himself, as “the Lord, the Lord God,

merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin" (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7.); his promises from the first one, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent" (Gen. iii. 15.), and the covenant to Abraham, that "in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed" (Gen. xviii. 18.), with a multitude of others, great and precious; the appointment of divine worship, showing that he might be approached by sinful men; and, above all, the institution of the rite of sacrifice, shadowing forth a great propitiation to be made (Heb. v. vi. vii. viii. ix. x. xi.); all testified that his counsel was of mercy to the sinner (Gal. iii.). These intimations were, however, all connected with intimations, as distinct, of some atonement necessary; for, at the same time that He declared himself merciful, He asserted that He would by no means clear the guilty (Ex. xxxiv. 7.); the promises were of a salvation

to come, and the sacrifices proved that "without the shedding of blood there was no remission" (Heb. ix. 22.).

These revelations all became more and more distinct, until the divine readiness to save was made fully known in the manifestation to the world of Christ, the Immanuel, our only and sufficient Saviour. How determined must God have been to save sinners when he spared not his only begotten Son, but delivered him up for us all?

Thus the penitent is awakened to hope by the long suffering of God, the gracious promises of God, and the merciful name of God; but, at the same time, feels the necessity of a sufficient atonement by which mercy may be justified, until he is led to Christ, when he is convinced that God can have no pleasure in the death of the sinner, because he has appointed his own Son to die in the sinner's room; though this conviction of the divine willingness to pardon through Christ, may

precede a distinct application of that pardon to his own soul.

This brings him to consider :

The *method* of forgiveness. It is through the mediation of Jesus Christ. He is the appointed Saviour, as his name, Christ the Anointed, Jesus the Saviour, and his consecration by the Holy Ghost, proves (Matt. i. 21. iii. 16, 17. Is. lxi. 1.). He was (and, blessed be his holy name! still is,) wonderfully constituted to be our Saviour, being God as the only begotten Son of the same nature with the Father (Phil. ii. 6.), and Man as the seed of the woman, made in all points like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. ii. 14-18.); the **DAYSMAN** between us and God, "laying his hands on us both" (Job ix. 23.). Thus as God, we are assured, he is able to do all that is needed for our redemption; and as Man, he is fitted to do all as our Kinsman-Redeemer (Lev. xxv. Job xix. 25.).

He has accomplished by his righteous life and

atoning death, a full satisfaction to the law of God on our behalf, having fulfilled the law and made it honourable by a righteousness with which God has declared himself well pleased, and an expiating death, which God has declared to be sufficient by raising him up from the dead. For God had promised that "by his knowledge his righteous servant should justify many" (Is. liii. 11.), and afterward has assured us that "he had set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii. 21-31.). Nay, more, having accomplished his work of merit on our behalf upon earth (John xix. 30.), he ascended upon high (Ps. lxviii. 18.), as our Head and Intercessor, to plead those merits, and to ask and receive gifts for men (Eph. iv. 8.), even all needed grace of the Holy Ghost (Acts ii. 34.), that the Lord our God might dwell in his

people; so that now all who will, may come unto the throne of grace, and find grace to help in every time of need (Heb. x. 20-22. iv. 15.).

This, then, is the method of forgiveness by our almighty Saviour, yet our sympathizing brother; his perfect righteousness, his sufficient expiation, his prevalent intercession, and his omnipotent Spirit, to teach, sanctify, guide, strengthen, and defend. "O the breadth, the length, the height, the depth of God's redeeming love!" now exclaims the penitent: "There is, indeed, forgiveness with him, enough to cover all my sins, my guilt, and corruption."

This appears the more fully, as he considers the application of forgiveness. It is applied to all who believe. There is no question about the merit of the sinner; it contemplates him only as lost, and needing forgiveness. The vilest may come and receive it without price. There is no question of his ability to render future service; it contemplates the sinner as utterly infirm, and able to do

good works only through grace, that the glory may be the Lord's: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" "Only believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." This is the promise; accept Him as thy divine, all sufficient, atoning, interceding, Saviour, and the moment thou believest, thou art saved! How free is this salvation! How suited to the wants of the penitent soul!

It is applied by the Holy Ghost. He, who prepared the way by convincing of sin, by casting from the soul of the penitent every other stay and hope, by leading him to look, and to cry only to God, now works in the soul this apprehending faith, and opens the fulness of the promise so clearly, that the penitent sees, feels, and knows it speaks to him (Eph. i. 17, 18, 19.). The dark shadows flee away; the light of divine love beams around him (Rom. viii. 5.); the love of God through Jesus Christ is shed abroad in his heart, and he rejoices in Christ, "who loved him and

gave himself for him" (Gal. ii. 20.). "Being justified by faith, he hath peace with God" (Rom. viii. 1.)

It is true, he is yet a sinner, weak, corrupt, and ignorant; yet "compassed about with a body of sin and death" (Rom. vii. 14-25.), yet in a world of temptations (Eph. vi. 12.); yet exposed to the malice of enemies, subtle and strong beyond his powers of resistance; but the sealing of forgiveness through Christ upon his heart, contains in it and is itself the earnest of perfect redemption (Eph. i. 14. 1 Cor. i. 30.). The sanctification now begun, shall be carried on unto perfection (Phil. i. 6.). He shall have grace in his heart to struggle against the evil lusts of his flesh (2 Cor. xii. 9.); light upon his path to guide him through the world that lieth in wickedness (Ps. cxix. 105.); an armour of heavenly proof for head, and breast, and feet, to conquer, by the strength of Christ, all his spiritual foes (Eph. vi. 13-17.); and at last, through death, be made

more than conqueror (1 Cor. xv. 54-57. Rom. viii. 37.). God who forgives him, will prove the fulness of his pardon by receiving him into a holy heaven, where he will sin no more, and be tempted no more, and grieve no more for ever, but spend an eternity of perfect love, and purity, and joy, in his Father's presence, at his Saviour's feet, and among the shining angels, body and soul complete with immortal and incorruptible life (Rev. xxii. 26. 1 Peter iii. 1-4). Now he lives no more for time, but for eternity; no more for earth, but for heaven; no more for sin, but unto God. "Out of the depths," he aspires to the height of heaven. He is forgiven; no more a rebel, but at peace with God; no more an enemy, but a child, and "if a son, then an heir; an heir of God, and joint heir with Jesus Christ" (Rom. viii. 17.).

Secondly: The proper consequence of faith in this truth.

"That thou mayest be feared."

Here is the necessary and infallible sign of living faith in the truth of God's forgiveness. Its discovery of mercy ever produces a holy reverence for God. The very revelation of mercy manifests more clearly God's holy hatred of sin. How much must He have hated sin, how stern must be his justice in condemning and punishing it, when He refuses to pardon the transgressor, except upon the condition that his own Son should bear the punishment, and honour the law, in the room of the sinner! When, though his own Son stood forth in the sinner's place, He remitted not one jot or tittle of his law's demands, but poured out upon the head of Jesus the vials of that wrath due to us! When it was not possible that the bitter "cup" should pass from the lips of Him who was mighty to save! O who can turn from the cross of Jesus, the Sufferer for sin, and not fear to sin against One so merciful, yet so just; so holy, yet so kind? How can any hope for mercy from God, when they continue wilful sinners against God?

The revelation of mercy through Christ brings God nearer to the soul of the believer. He lives before God ; he invokes God by his prayers ; he communes with God in meditation upon his word ; he entreats God to dwell in his heart. How then will he dare to offend against that present, holy, all-seeing Spirit, whose holiness and purity is thus more and more apparent, as he enjoys him more and more through Christ ?

The revelation of mercy absorbs the soul of the sinner with a grateful love. He delights in God as the holy God, the just God, the God who delighteth in righteousness ; and so the true believer himself delights in holiness, and justice, and righteousness. It is his desire, his hope, his aim, to become holy, as God is holy. It is to him an unspeakable pleasure to worship God, to serve him, nay, to fear him, not as a servant, but a child. He is pained at sin remaining in him, because it offends his God, and is an unlikeness to Christ, whom God loves. He desires heaven

most, because there he shall serve God perfectly, and so he would commence heaven upon earth. "The love of Christ constraineth him . . . to live not unto himself, but unto him who died for him, and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 15.).

Nay, the Spirit of God never applies pardon to the soul of a sinner, that he does not at the same time enter his heart to fill him with the love of God. Thus faith, as one apostle says, "purifieth the heart" (Acts xv. 9.), "worketh by love" (Gal. v. 6.); and another: "overcometh the world" (1 John v. 4.). This effect of faith proves its reality, for "faith without works is dead" (James ii. 17.). All other seeming faith is but seeming, a counterfeit, a damning delusion.

From all this we may learn, that

The true penitent is never satisfied until he has found God in Christ. If his penitence be the work of the Spirit of Christ, that Spirit will lead him to Christ. Until the blood of Christ is sprinkled upon his conscience, he can have no peace; until the

Holy Spirit has applied the promise of God through Christ to his soul, he can have no hope. He must have a Saviour whom God approves, or God will not accept him; an almighty Saviour, or he cannot reach his case; an atoning Saviour, or his sins will still cry out against him; an interceding Saviour, or he dare not approach unto God; a sanctifying Saviour, or he will never overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil; a Saviour unto the uttermost, or he will fall far short of heaven. All this he can find only in Christ.

The true penitent casts himself confidently upon God in Christ for salvation. As he has felt his need of Christ, so now he sees Christ's fitness to save him. His regard for the holiness of God, the exactness of his justice, and the truth of his promise, will not now allow him to doubt that Christ, whom God has appointed, accepted, and revealed as the only Saviour, is able to save his soul, is willing to save his soul; nay, does begin the work of salvation in his soul. Unbelief would

be insult to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. To insist, or even dream of mingling any thing of his own with the merits of Christ, would be to doubt the sufficiency of God's method to save, and to cling to some merit of his own. He finds all he needs, all he desires, in Christ alone.

The true penitent continues and increases his penitence after he has drawn hope from Christ. Repentance with him lies not in a few spasms, tears, and hours of anguish, at the commencement of his Christian life. He repents, so long as a sin remains to be subdued, a temptation overcome, or a grace to be attained. The more he knows of God, his love as well as his holiness, his mercy as well as his justice, the more does he love God and desire to serve him; the more is he dissatisfied with any degree of service he can render; the more he longs after a perfect holiness. This is the spirit of heaven, the earnest of eternal life. Such a soul God certainly accepts through Jesus Christ his Son.

But what increased sin, and guilt, and danger, are theirs, who hear of Christ and reject him; who, when they might have mercy, defy God's wrath; who "trample upon the body of the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?" How can they be saved whom even mercy does not reach? "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed upon the only-begotten Son of God." Condemned! condemned of God! Condemned for rejecting the only begotten Son of God! Condemned already! The sentence is not against them; it rests upon them. Nay, the Saviour will himself be the Judge to order the sentence executed. God, said the apostle to the Athenians (Acts xvii. 31.), "hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The office Christ came to execute was

not simply the salvation of sinners, but also the vindication of the divine justice. For the sake of his righteousness and intercession, the execution of the sentence against our sinful race was suspended, to give men an opportunity of faith and repentance. For the same reasons, Christ has been exalted, and armed with all authority in heaven and in earth. Now he gives repentance and remission of sins to all who call upon him for the mercy which has been justified by this atonement; but when the time of this merciful waiting is exhausted, when, though many have honoured God by believing on his Son as their Saviour, there will yet be found many who have rejected the offers of life, and continued in sin, it becomes Christ as the Steward of his Father's glory, and the Vindicator of the law, to see that justice, long and mercifully, though, in the case of these obstinate transgressors, fruitlessly delayed, is satisfied. Had they repented and believed in Christ, he would have applied the satisfaction made by him-

self to their acquittal; but, as they would not accept of his vicarious merit, they themselves must bear the sentence upon their own souls, and Christ must see it executed. Their guilt has been greatly increased; they have not only despised the law of God, but his gospel; not only defied his wrath, but rejected his grace; made his long suffering an encouragement to continued rebellion, and forced their way through the restraints of the Spirit down to depths of sin, which never could have been reached, had not God been willing to forgive, and Christ died to save. The atonement itself would be a reproach, if the almighty Saviour were to permit the escape of the penitent, for then would Christ be "the minister of sin" (Gal. ii. 17.). No crime can be greater than that of thus making the gospel, by which God intends, through the display of mercy in harmony with justice, to convert us from our sin, an encouragement to sin on; and, therefore, will Christ visit with peculiarly heavy punishment, all who, because his intercession has

prevented the sentence against their evil work from being executed speedily, set their hearts more fully to do evil (Eccl. viii. 11.). They might have been saved, because there was forgiveness with Him; they cannot be saved when that forgiveness is no longer offered; and the only Saviour from the wrath of God, is the Judge to execute his vengeance.

O holy and merciful Lord God, our Redeemer and our Judge! save us from our unbelief and impenitence, that we may be saved from thy wrath; working in us by thy Holy Spirit, that child-like, salutary fear of thee, which is the earnest of eternal life!

VII.

THE CONDUCT OF THE PENITENT.

“I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait; and in his word do I hope.

“My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John xii. 32.), said the Saviour; and, adds the Evangelist: “this he said, signifying what death he should die.” But the Master had declared on a previous occasion: “No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him.” Thus we are clearly

taught, that the true penitent is drawn, not driven, unto God; that the great attractive of the soul to God, is the manifestation of God's forgiveness through Christ crucified; and that it is nothing less than Divine Power, which so manifests the forgiving love of God through Christ crucified, as to draw the soul irresistibly, yet sweetly, unto himself. Except, therefore, the sinner be drawn unto God, he is not truly penitent; but, if he be drawn unto God, he has certain proof of having been effectually called through faith in Christ Jesus unto eternal life. The conduct of the penitent in our psalm illustrates these doctrines.

We have seen him raised, by the grace of the Holy Ghost, "out of the depths" of his sin, guilt and corruption, even while convinced of his utter unworthiness, to a confident though humble faith in the forgiveness which is with God. But so far from relapsing into cold indifference because pardon is revealed; so far from continuing in wilful sin, because grace abounds (Rom. vi. 1, 2);

so far from faith in a free, unmerited, and unpurchaseable salvation, encouraging him to a careless or licentious practice, (as the revilers of justification by faith slanderously report, Rom. iii. 8.), the more he discovers of God's forgiving kindness, the more does he reverently honour and fear to offend the God of his salvation. Nay, the grace he has received, quickens his appetite for more grace; he feels his entire dependence upon God's help, and is determined to cling always, and until the end, to that almighty and most merciful arm, which raised him up "out of the horrible pit, and the miry clay," and "set his feet upon a rock" (Ps. xl. 2.), the Rock Christ Jesus. For he says: "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning."

Here we must consider, His *waiting*; His waiting *for the Lord*; His waiting for the Lord

with hope in his word; His waiting for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.

I. Waiting.

II. Godly waiting.

III. Hopeful waiting.

IV. Watchful, constant, ardent waiting.

I. His *waiting*.

The word rendered *waiting*, literally signifies a direct tendency toward an object, as the tendency of streams to the sea. When used in a moral sense to describe a disposition of the soul, it implies a drawing near to another, from a sense of dependence, a desire of favour, and an expectation of good. It is the flowing forth of the whole soul, its thoughts, its affections, its wishes, and its confidence. It is not an occasional disposition, but a habit of the soul; not an idle or indifferent, but an active temper, showing itself in petitions, earnest looks, and persevering endeavours to obtain the good desired;

as the faithful servant waits upon his master, or the affectionate child upon its parent. It implies choice, sense of need, application for help, obedience and trust. Here it is:

II. *Godly waiting.* *Waiting for the Lord.*

“Waiting for the Lord,” describes the *conduct* of every soul conscious of sin, yet believing that there is forgiveness with Jehovah. It is not merely a looking for deliverance in circumstances of distress or danger, but the prevailing, appropriate, characteristic temper of a faithful penitent. Thus the Psalmist: “Truly my soul waiteth upon God; from him cometh my salvation;” “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him” (Ps. lxii. 1. 5.); “They that wait on the Lord, shall inherit the earth” (Ps. xxxvii. 9.); And the prophet: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint” (Is. xl. 31.).

Such a soul is ever drawing nigh unto God (Ps. lxxiii. 28.). The wicked depart from God (Ps. lxxiii. 27.); like the prodigal from his father's house, (Luke xv. 13.), they desire to forget God (Ps. ix. 17.), and to have no fear of God before their eyes (Ps. xxxvi. 1.); because the idea of God's presence restrains them from sinful indulgence. The fact of their dependence upon God offends their pride, and the remembrance of the divine justice alarms their conscience, fastening terror upon their souls (John iii. 19, 20.). To be "ungodly," to be "without God," and to be wicked, mean the same thing. The true penitent returns unto God (Luke xv. 17-20.) meditates upon God (Ps. i. 1, 2.), and fears before him all the day (Ps. xxv. 5. xci. 2.); because a sense of God's presence is a refuge and defence from temptation (Ps. lxi. 3.); the divine character excites an admiring reverence (Ps. cxxx. 4.), with a desire to be like him (Ps. xvii. 15.), and the forgiving mercy of God encourages and moves

him to attempt the divine service (Ps. cxvi. 5.). He loves God, and therefore longs to be with him, and to enjoy him (Ps. xlii. 1, 2.). The more that he fears to sin, the nearer does he draw unto God (John vi. 37.). The tide of his affections is changed, for as they were before prone toward earth, they now aspire toward heaven (Col. iii. 2.).

The penitent believer is deeply sensible of his entire dependence. Raised from the depths of sin, he feels his utter unworthiness; from the depths of guilt, his need of pardoning mercy; from the depths of corruption, his need of divine grace. All things are the Lord's, and therefore God only can bestow what is needful, as well for his body as his soul (Ps. cxlv. 15.). God bestows no favour upon the unworthy (Ps. lxxxiv. 11.), and, therefore, except he be covered with the worthiness of Christ, he can have no blessing. God's blessing is found only in the way of righteousness (Is. lxiv. 5.); and, therefore, except

he be upheld, and guided, and strengthened by the Holy Ghost (Is. xl. 29.), he cannot maintain himself in a godly life. He is, therefore, entirely dependent upon God in Christ. He earnestly desires this divine favour. The most ordinary things necessary to his comfort in this life, he values, chiefly because they are proofs of God's love (Rom. viii. 32.). He delights to receive his daily bread, his daily strength, his nightly rest, his familiar enjoyments, from the hand of his heavenly Father, as the gifts of God through Jesus Christ; and so he waits upon God for them.

But it is the favour of God to his soul, he desires the most. He longs for a perfect cleansing, a complete sanctification, an entire obedience; so long as a sin remains in him, as he is unable to perform any duty, as he is prone to relapse into folly, and to mingle his vain thoughts and affections with the pure knowledge and love of God, does he desire grace, which God alone can give; grace which seals him as a child of

God; grace which is the earnest and the foretaste of a heavenly life. Comfort for his sorrow, light for his ignorance, strength for his weakness—all he desires from God. He is never secure, except in God. The temptation baffled to-day, starts into new strength on the morrow, or is succeeded by others more subtle, strong, and dangerous. Thus is he ever desiring help from God, and ever waits upon him; and

Thus he *makes application* unto God. He prays, for God hears prayer through Jesus Christ. Nor is his prayer interrupted and occasional; for, though he cannot be always upon his knees, nor uttering words of supplication, there is a constant spirit of prayer in his heart, and his desire is to the Lord at all times. His weeping eyes are lifted up to Him, who sees the heart and reads the countenance. Prayer is as necessary to him as breath; he cannot live without it.

As he asks for grace, so he obeys God in the use of those means, which he has appointed to be the

channels of his blessing. He endeavours to forsake every evil way, which God declares leads to death, and to pursue every righteous path, which God declares leads unto life. He searches the Scriptures daily, as men cultivate the earth for food. The truth is as necessary to his soul as daily bread is to his body. He cannot live without it. He goes to the sanctuary, because there God delights to dwell. He listens to the preaching of the word, because "it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." He receives the sacraments, because the Master, who ordained them, makes them to every penitent soul the washing away of sin, the bread of life, and the wine of joy. He mingles humble thanksgiving with all his service, and cordial praise with all his prayers, because with such sacrifices God is well pleased through Jesus Christ. Nay, he rejoices to consecrate all his powers, all his talents, all his means, and all his time, as an offering of devout gratitude to the service of God,

and to His service in doing good to men. This is the way in which his Master walked, the way in which God has commanded him to walk, the way which leads from grace unto grace, until he is complete in heaven.

Intimately connected with this obedience is *submission* to the will of God in providence. He waits upon God for blessing; he has committed his soul unto God for sanctification, and, therefore, he meekly receives the lot, the chastisement, the care that God sends, believing that what God chooses for him is best, what God makes him suffer is needed, and the channel by which God conveys blessing, the safest and the truest. It is as much the part of true piety to suffer patiently, as it is to obey actively.

Thus waiting upon God only, and in the way of God's commandments only, he expects the answer to the desires of his heart. As he longs, as he prays, as he walks in the path of uprightness, he is ever ready, with his heart open, to

receive the grace which he needs and seeks. For his is

III. *Hopeful waiting.*

“In his word do I hope.”

Hope is more than mere longing (Rom. viii. 24, 25.); it is founded upon some warrant that we shall receive what we desire. The hope of the true penitent is thus intelligent, because it is built upon the word of God, which cannot deceive or fail. His faith receives that word as true, therefore he hopes. He waits in hope, not because he deserves any thing himself, he is utterly unworthy; nor because he prays, or obeys, or submits, for, being unworthy, there can be no procuring cause in any thing he does; but only from the forgiving mercy and sovereign grace of God, as revealed to him by God's own word and Spirit. From the word he learns the infinite merit of Christ his Saviour. Though he deserves nothing but wrath, Christ hath provided an infinite merit of atonement to cleanse him from his sin, and an

infinite merit of obedience to *deserve for him* all the riches of God. Because he believes God will be faithful to his own Son, the penitent hopes that God, for his Son's sake, will withhold from him no good thing. It is not presumption, but an honouring of Christ to expect great blessing for his sake.

He reads in the gospel which reveals Christ, the great compassion and regard of God for his soul. What unbounded love towards his chosen must have overflowed from the heart of God, when "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all!" How determined must God have been to bless the believer in Jesus, when he constituted him our advocate and intercessor! How certainly will He listen to the prayers for us of that beloved Son in whom He is well pleased! How shall He not, when He gives Jesus to us as our atonement, righteousness, and intercessor, "with him also freely give us all things?"

The same gospel reveals to him the almighty Agent in the conferring and application of blessing,

even the third person in the ever adorable Trinity, (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost!) the Divine Spirit. How certainly will that Holy Spirit detect our every need, searching our hearts, and knowing our ways! How wisely will that Holy Spirit arrange and provide the various economies for our weak and imperfect natures! How infinitely rich in all that is good for us, must that Holy Spirit be! What can we want which He does not know, and cannot in the best manner bestow?

And then he reads the *promises* of God, exceedingly great, and exceedingly precious, in number, variety, adaptedness, and fulness. There are no possible circumstances in which he can be placed, that he has not a promise waiting for him. All these promises are his by the purchase of Christ, by the covenant oath of God, by the applying grace of the Holy Ghost. In them he reads what God purposes to do for him, what God has directed him to ask for, what God com-

mands him to expect from his fatherly love. God, by his Spirit in Christ Jesus, has made him to hope upon his word; and taught him to appropriate those promises to his soul; nor would he awaken desires so strong only to mock them with disappointment. The word of God, and the Spirit of God, cause him to rejoice in hope; and therefore he waits in hope. As he receives grace in answer to his prayer, he is encouraged to hope for more; so his desire and his hope increase with their gratification.

Thus is his,

IV. A *watchful, constant, ardent* waiting.

“I wait for the Lord. My soul doth wait . . . My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; nay, more than they that watch for the morning.”

The figure here employed is very simple and expressive. As one, made for any reason to watch through the night long till the day breaks and the shadows flee away, fixes his eye on the

eastern horizon to catch the first shootings of the dawn, and thinks the minutes slow until the gray light appears, heralding the joyous sun, so does the faithful penitent in this world of sins and shadows, wait for the full day of God's perfect love, and perfect glory.

He waits *watchfully*.

He is yet in a world of sin and temptation. He dare not sleep, lest he should be caught sleeping and be shorn of his strength. He watches against his own heart, the world, the flesh, and the devil, longing for the holy light which shall chase away every thing that hurts or deceives; when lust, and wrong, and sin of every sort, shall retire, like the wild beasts of the forest to their dens. He is not safe until the perfect day, and therefore he watches until the day. His master's command is: "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation," and he obeys it.

Though it is night, God has given him work to do until morning. The Evangelist, speaking of

the gospel, says: "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not" (John i. 5.). The gospel is light, compared to the darkness of sin and ignorance which covers the world. The apostle Peter, in the use of the same figure, declares that Christians are called to "show forth the praises (the energies) of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9.). Our Master had before said to his disciples, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. v. 14.). Nay, the Wisdom had revealed to the Old Testament saint, that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18.). The believer even now has a measure of light to cheer him, to guide him (Ephes. v. 8.), and to distinguish him as "a child of the day" (1 Thess. v. 5.). Therefore is he "not to sleep as do others, but to watch and be sober," "putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation." He is to let his light so shine.

before men, that they, may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven (Matt. v. 16.). In other words, he is so to love and labour for the cause of Christ, that men may, by God's blessing upon his zeal, be led to prepare for the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Besides, his desire will not suffer him to sleep. He hopes for the fulness of his joy, nor can he, from the very pleasure of the expectation, close his eyes in spiritual slumber. He expects in the morning the coming of his best Friend; how can his loving heart rest from the uneasiness of so joyous a hope? He expects that then his prison doors will be opened, and he be free to walk abroad in perfect liberty; how can the captive sleep in the night before his complete emancipation? He expects that in the morning he shall reach his happy and eternal home; what wonder that he wakefully pursues his heaven-lighted path?

He waits *constantly*.

There is not a moment that he is not in danger

of surprise from sin ; and, therefore, like a watchful sentinel, he is ever on the alert. There is not a moment when he has not work to do for his Master, when his light ought not to be shining before men, and his Christian character made manifest, that God may be glorified. At all times his heart is burning with desire for more and more manifestations of the divine love. His hope is for perfect holiness, for heaven, for immortality in the presence of God ; and he can never cease longing until his satisfaction is complete.

Nor can he tell at what moment God will appear to his soul. God often works mysteriously, though ever wisely. He withholds his sensible presence for a season, to try his people's faith and constancy. The times of our spiritual joys on earth, and the time of our complete emancipation by death from all earth's trials, He keeps in his own hand and power. Therefore must the true penitent be ever found in the use of the means,

ever prepared for the Lord's coming, ever expecting his awful and joyous presence.

He watches through the long night! He does not give over in despair, nor become weary through disappointment. He knows that the day will break. The stars of promise above him, shining down through the dim atmosphere, prove to him that the Sun from whom they derive their light is shining, though he has not yet risen above the horizon. Soon He will arise and bring the perfect day. Every gleam of spiritual comfort encourages him with new hopes of his Master's grace and glory.

He waits with *ardour*.

God in Christ has now become all in all to his soul. He loves him with his whole heart, and he is impatient of every sin or doubt that hinders him from giving up his whole being to his Lord.

His whole happiness now is in the divine favour, and he ardently longs until God, having trans-

formed him to a nobler nature, will pour out that favour without measure upon him.

The tastes of the divine goodness, and the glimpses of the divine beauty, that he has had, and has increasingly, ravish him from the sinful pleasures and cares of this world, and set his whole soul on flame, as it were, for a full fruition. If such be the first fruits, what must be the full vintage? If the light of promise be so sweet, what must be the glory of the perfect day?

Thus does the penitent believer long for the Lord, "more than they that long for the morning."

In all this, see what the conduct of the true penitent is.

1. Religion rules his whole life.

He is ever waiting for the Lord. Not like those who, having been roused to a sense of their danger, seek but to stupify their consciences, and having cheated themselves with some imaginary safety, relapse into sin and thoughtlessness. Not

like those, who occasionally, as just before a communion day, affect an unwonted piety, as though a work of special devotion could make amends for months of lukewarmness. Nor even like those, who, content with regular prayers or religious meetings, are only religious when engaged in immediate devotion. Religion is his constant, characteristic walk. He waits for the Lord at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances. His continual effort is to know, to obey, and to glorify God. This is his sole aim, his only business, his great delight.

2. The word of the Lord is his only stay.

There he learns what God is, and he never allows himself to mingle any imaginations of his own, or of other men, with the character God has revealed of himself. There he learns how God is gracious and forgiving, and never mingles any supposed merit of his own with the righteousness of Christ, whom God has appointed to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and

remission of sins. There he learns what God would have him to do, and he never mingles his own views of what is right, or the world's opinion of duty, with the divine directions. God is his sole master. To His service he has consecrated himself, and His word he obeys. There he reads the evidences of conversion, which God has declared to be true and sufficient, and in faith upon God's simple promises through Christ Jesus, he casts himself, by the grace of the Holy Ghost, wholly upon God.

3. He is never satisfied with any degree of religious attainment in this life. His hope is set upon heaven, upon the perfect redemption, and the perfect holiness promised to him there. So in this preparatory state, he is always endeavouring to approach nearer and nearer to the character of heaven, in knowledge, in love, and in holiness. He patiently waits for his deliverance, while he ardently longs for the day, when he will be complete in the glory radiating from the face of God

his Saviour, and "upon all the glory there shall be a defence" (Is. iv. 5.) from sin, temptation, doubt, and sorrow. He may have his moments of anxiety, sadness and gloom, because he is still compassed about with the body of sin and death, still living in a polluted and seductive world, still exposed to the machinations of the evil one, but the conduct of his life is "waiting for the Lord."

In what sad contrast to this is the condition of those who live "without God and without hope!" to whose impenitent souls, the idea of God is painful, because they know him only as an angry Judge, and death terrible as the termination of all their enjoyments, and the beginning of their eternal woe! In vain they strive to drown the alarms of conscience by the occupations of business, the delirium of pleasure, or the sophisms of infidelity. They cannot altogether, or at all times, escape from the dreadful forebodings which a sense of their sin, and the declarations of the divine word, force upon them. There are silent,

lonely moments, when, like the devils, they “believe and tremble;” nay, apprehensions of divine vengeance reach them in the midst of their worldly pride and exultation; the sword hangs over their heads at the feast; horrible spectres meet them in the dance; their wealth aggravates their bitterness, because they cannot keep it for ever, nor will it save them from the dreadful account, when they must suffer the more because of its abuse; while they listen to their flatterers, a secret oracle within them pronounces them fools, whose soul in a moment may be required of them. Too well taught to disbelieve the retributions of eternity, yet too much in love with sin to give up its pursuit, they lose the enjoyment of this world through fear of the next, and pass from a life of anxiety to the reality which they dreaded, but would not escape from. There remains to them “a certain, fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” of God and his law (Heb. x. 17.). “There is no

peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Is. lvii. 21.); but especially none for those who know the truth, yet will not obey it. The God, who smiles upon the penitent, is to them "a consuming fire;" the Saviour, upon whom the believer leans, is their avenging enemy; the gospel, that speaks glad tidings to the humble seeker, only confirms their eternal ruin; and already, in tormenting anticipation of their doom, they see heaven afar off, across a gulf they cannot pass. O, that they might yet turn and seek the Lord, if, peradventure, they yet may have life!

VIII.

THE EXHORTATION OF THE PENITENT.

“LET Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

What a surprising change has been wrought in our penitent! He, whom we found “in the depths,” “crying” for deliverance, is now so confident of safety, that he becomes the teller of good news to all sorrowful, sin-troubled souls, exhorting them to hope in the same grace, wherein he stands (Rom. v. 2.).

Critics tell us, that when this psalm was used in the Temple service, these last two verses were, probably, sung as a response by the priest, who thus called upon the whole congregation to profit from the story of the grateful penitent. Be this as it may, there is no need, for our purposes, of introducing another speaker than the penitent himself. They describe the spirit and language of every true convert from sin unto God. Every rescued sinner is born into the Spirit of God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, the God of salvation, who is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto repentance" (2 Peter iii. 9.); and, therefore, he earnestly desires the salvation of all sinners like himself, tells them of the mercy which he has found, and endeavours to bring them to that JESUS, who has healed his soul. Such regard to the best good of others, is a necessary evidence of his being a child of God, a follower of Christ, and a temple of the Holy Ghost; of God, who gave his only begotten

Son; of Christ, who lived, and died, and rose again; of the Holy Ghost, whose almighty energies are put forth for the salvation of sinners.

The true penitent is moved to this zeal for the salvation of his fellow sinners by *love for their souls*. He sees the guilt and danger which they are in, for he has been himself in the same depths. He has been made to feel how dreadful a thing it is to sin against God, the terribleness of the divine wrath, and the impossibility of escape from its eternal consequences after the present day of mercy has gone by. The insensibility of impenitent men to their true condition, alarms and distresses him; for, so long as they remain thus wilfully blind and careless of their souls, he has no hope of their rescue. He trembles as he thinks of their utter ruin, and the agonies of their eternal death. Common humanity pities the peril or suffering of a fellow creature, and will strive, if possible, to avert it; what then must be the compassion and solicitude of a Christian heart for

an immortal soul, sleeping unconcerned on the brink of endless and unspeakable anguish !

At the same time he knows the readiness, the sufficiency, and the preciousness of God's mercy in Christ Jesus to save even to the uttermost. He has had sweet experience of the riches of grace in his own soul. He has felt the power of the Saviour's arm in uplifting him from the depths of his despair, the cleansing efficacy of the Saviour's blood in washing away all his guilt, and the sanctifying virtue of the Saviour's Spirit in turning his affections to God, in filling his soul with holy thought, and in bringing him to a sweet, reverent, and confiding "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." He is yet a sinner, and every moment he has occasion for fresh repentance; but every moment he may apply by faith the blood of sprinkling and of peace, to his conscience. He is yet weak, altogether insufficient of himself for any good thing; but he has an Almighty Helper, who strengthens him from on

high to resist temptation, to bear his burden meekly, and to do his Master's will. He is yet corrupt, and "sin dwelleth in him," but the process of sanctification is begun in his heart; there is a resistless energy there, not his own, battling with, and, in sure progress, overcoming his unbelief and proneness to sin, the earnest of an ultimate, entire deliverance; and, above all, he has hope in God's covenant-promise of an eternal heaven, where none of his sin, and weakness, and corruption can follow him, but where, in perfect holiness, pure joy, and immortal vigour, he shall serve God with his entire nature, and be filled with the delight of God's presence, love, and approval. As he rejoices in this experience of divine grace, so free and so boundless, he earnestly longs that others, who are yet "in the depths," may be raised up to be partakers with him of the same salvation. There is enough for all. Thousands may come and drink in eternal life from these waters, and yet there be none the less. The

love of God in his heart has expanded it to a largeness of affection, which would embrace all in that blessedness which he enjoys. Every motive that bids man love his neighbour, urges the Christian, with a force unspeakable, to seek the eternal good of his fellow sinner.

The true penitent is moved to zeal for the salvation of others, *by love for his own soul*. He desires assurance of his own interest in Christ; and the Holy Ghost instructs him, that he must make his calling and election sure by fruitfulness in good works. For, says the beloved disciple, "he that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John ii. 6.). And how did Christ walk? Was it not in the entire consecration of Himself to the salvation of men's souls, by his teaching, by his example, by his righteous life, and atoning death; nay, since he has risen again, by his continual intercession and royal power! It is, therefore, only while like Christ he is endeavouring to save men's souls, that he is

sure of being in the way to eternal life, the way by which Jesus, the Forerunner, has passed into heaven for us. He desires to grow in grace, and in the knowledge and joy of faith, and the Holy Ghost instructs him, that grace is not given to the idle (Prov. xix. 15.), but that "God meeteth him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness" (Isa. lxiv. 5.); nay, that according to the testimony of Christ's own experience, the doing of God's will is itself as meat and drink for the nourishment of the soul (John iv. 32-34.). Indeed, he finds in faithful practice, that mercy to others is a sure way, by divine blessing, of receiving larger mercy for himself; that, as he teaches others, God teaches him; as he comforts others, God comforts him; as he prays for others, the blessing returns upon his own head; and, as he sows the seed of good works by a holy husbandry, the spiritual exercise gives to his soul a more healthful strength, a better appetite for the bread of life, while it secures an abundant harvest of holy fruit.

In these Christian labours, his thoughts, so apt to wander in sin, are fixed upon better purposes; his hands, so apt to busy themselves in sin, are occupied with pious deeds; and his time, so apt to be wasted upon the trifles, and worse than trifles, of the world, is more than filled up with opportunities of good, which increase in number and richness as he improves them. What Christian, who has thus served the souls of his fellow sinners, will not gladly testify, that in seeking to do them good, to enlighten their darkness, to refute their scepticism, to remove their doubts, and to help them out of their difficulties, he has found his own faith strengthened, his own temptations subdued, and his own comforts more abundant? Who are they, that in the church of God walk with uplifted head, cheerful countenance and steady progress, but those who do, or endeavour to do, the most good to the souls of others? On the contrary, they, upon whom the world exerts its worst influence, upon whose ear the word of God falls

with the least effect, whose religion seems rather a restraint than a privilege, are those who do the least, pray the least, and give the least for the salvation of others.

He desires the rewards of eternal life. He has been too well taught by the Spirit of God, to believe that he can purchase an entrance into heaven by his own good works, or that its glorious joy can be won by any less price than the infinite merit of Christ his Saviour; but, at the same time, he reads that it is part of God's gracious purpose in the economy of grace, to allow no good deed of his servant, though it be no more than giving a cup of cold water, to be without its wages (Matt. x. 22. xxv.); nay, that, according to our fidelity now, shall be our dignity hereafter; for, while "the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, they that turn many to righteousness shall be as stars in that firmament for ever and ever" (Daniel xii. 3.). Of all the services we can render to men, the greatest is that of assisting them in the

salvation of their souls. Success in this highest effort of charity, was the joy which the Master set before himself (Heb. xii. 2.), and into which every faithful servant shall enter with him (Matt. xxv. 21.). It is God's greatest work and greatest glory to save sinners, and his best rewards are for those who are most like himself. Therefore, as the Christian soul desires heaven, so will he desire to take others with him there. Thus is doing good to men's souls vitally connected with his best interest, his highest pleasure, and his holiest hope.

There is a yet stronger motive, the one, indeed, that gives strength to those already named, which excites the true penitent's zeal for the salvation of his fellow sinners: *The glory of his God*. The first conviction of the Christian on perceiving the mercy of God to his soul, is, that he is not his "own," but "bought with a price" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.), belonging to his faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. As the creature of God,

sustained by God's power and supported by his bounty, a subject of God's laws and responsible at God's judgment seat, he belongs unto God; but until he was awakened from his sin by the Spirit of Christ, his soul was dead to every sense of such obligation. Now the love of God in Christ "constrains him," and he resolves with delight "to live not unto himself, but unto him who died for him, and who rose again" (2 Cor. v. 14.). He acknowledges himself as twice the Lord's, by creation and redemption. In the greatness of that love of God which pitied him in his sins, and determined to save him; the greatness of the provision made in the person and work of Christ for his eternal welfare; the greatness of that spiritual Power, which, in long suffering patience, bore with and overcame the obstinacy of his impenitence, and shed light and life supernatural through his soul; and the greatness of the change from his condemnation to eternal death, unto heirship of eternal life, he reads the claims which God

has upon his whole heart, his whole time, his whole energy. Therefore he confesses himself wholly the Lord's, and determines to do all that he does to the glory of God (1 Cor. x. 31.). This is the reality of conversion to God, the genuine repentance which has the promise of life; and all change, less than this, comes short of repentance.

The Scriptures abundantly show us, that such entire consecration to God, does not forbid, but is every way consistent with, love and service to our fellow men, and endeavours to secure our own personal happiness. The same law, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves, commands us to love God with all our hearts. The same gospel, which insists upon our glorifying God with our bodies and spirits which are his, proposes the rewards of heaven as motives to our zeal. But it is, because the love of God includes and sanctifies all other warranted love and aims, that, while we love our neighbours as ourselves, while we love our own souls, and strive

to secure their and our own salvation, the glory of God should be our chief purpose and paramount motive. It is the recognition of this principle, which alone can secure a Christian's steadfastness in duty, amidst the seeming conflict of human interests, prevent him from being led astray by lower and base motives, or encourage him to perseverance until the end, notwithstanding the opposition and enmity, and even persecution, of those whom he seeks to serve. If his aim be not high as the throne of God, he will prove weak, wavering, and easily disgusted with the painful but only path, by which we can reach glory, honour, and immortality, "patient continuance in well doing." When he feels that God is his master, whose law is perfect, and whose promises of reward are sure, the world's seductions, ridicule, or hatred, will be alike powerless.

Then, as he belongs to God, his question is: "What will the Lord have me to do?" in what manner has God declared I may serve him most

acceptably? and the answer to this is readily learned from God's holy word. What purpose of God in his providence toward this world, is paramount over all others? The salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, his Son. What work of God has he wrought at the vastest expense, and by the mightiest instrumentality? The salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, his Son. What was the aim of Christ, when upon earth he set a divine example of human duty? The salvation of sinners. What is the office of the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of the Father and of the Son? The conversion and sanctification of sinners by Christ. What is the employment of the angelic host of the Son of God? They are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. i. 14.). What was the great command of Christ to the apostolic representatives of his church? To preach the gospel of salvation to sinners. To what service does God propose the highest rewards in heaven? As we have already

seen, zeal for the salvation of sinners. What are the means which God employs in carrying on this great work of his in this world? Christian example, Christian prayers, and Christian activity in the diffusion of truth.

The Christian's duty is, therefore, very clear. It is to consecrate all that he has, all that he is, and all that by God's grace he can be, to the glory of God in the salvation of his fellow sinners; because that is the work which God himself most delights in, which He commands him to perform, and from which He will have his chiefest glory. The love of Christ to his own soul, thus constrains him to live for the souls of others, and he accounts it his highest privilege, that he is permitted to employ his energies in so glorious, dignifying, and enriching a work, as persuading, by God's grace, those who are dead in trespasses and sins to live for the glory of God here, and, escaping from eternal death, glorify God in an eternal blessedness. Thus is he a worker together with God

the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, in securing the salvation of dying men, his own eternal reward, and God's most manifold glory.

All our observations have been so immediately practical, that no inferences which might be drawn at the close could be more so. Several lessons may, however, be repeated with advantage.

No one can be a true penitent who is indifferent to the salvation of his fellow sinners.

If he really believe in an eternal hell, he cannot help but feel a deep anxiety for those who are in danger of eternal death. Who can think of immortal souls exposed to everlasting burnings, the fearful weight of God's endless wrath, and not weep, and pray, and strive to save them? If he really believe in an eternal heaven of joy and truth and holiness, freely offered through Christ to all who will accept it by faith upon his promise, he must desire that his fellow men may share its hope with him; nor will he cease to declare the

manifold riches of that grace which has saved his soul, and is ready to save theirs.

If he really apprehend for himself the love of God in Christ, which, at such expense, and after such long suffering, lifts him up from such depths of sin and guilt and corruption, to such heights of purity and favour and holiness, he must speak out in the gratitude of his soul, and declare the riches of the grace of God, and call upon all men to magnify the Lord with him, and to exalt his name. Nay, with the apostle, he will regard himself as having obtained mercy for this cause: that "in him Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. i. 16.).

I charge you, therefore, before God, that you do not deceive yourselves with the supposition that you are Christians, if you be not diligently and earnestly engaged in doing good to men's souls. Your opportunities may be various, some

greater, and some less; but no one is without opportunities for this work, to which you are called. *To be idle is to be dead*; dead to the best interests of those around you; dead to the hope of eternal reward; dead to the love of the glory of God.

No converted sinner can ever do enough for God in this work of saving men's souls.

While a single sinner remains unconverted, or a single saint imperfectly sanctified, there is work to be done, a great work, and a glorious work. That one soul, more precious than a world or a universe of matter, must suffer or enjoy immortally. Think, my reader, if the whole of mankind were become Christians, except one poor impenitent, what a power of sympathy and prayer and effort, would be turned toward his salvation; but now, while many around us, while millions of our race are perishing through sin, while even in the circle of your friends, perhaps your very household, there are those who are without God, how

cold is Christian zeal, how feeble and how few are Christian prayers, how meagre, and how reluctant are Christian gifts for the cause of salvation!

Christ has bought our whole life. We were utterly lost without his salvation; all we have is his by purchase, and by gift. We have no right to keep any thing back from him. All is His, and we are dishonest, as well as ungrateful, if we do less, or pray less, or give less than we possibly can for him. What did he keep back from us, when he gave Himself, all the riches of his divinity, all the perfection of his humanity, for us? What has He not done for us, when He began in eternity the purpose of our salvation, and in his life upon earth, went continually about doing good, suffering wrong, and working out our salvation, even until death? What did He not give for us, when though "he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. viii. 9.)? How has He prayed

for us, who, in the far eternity, cried : “ Deliver from going down to the pit : I have found a ransom ” (Job xxxiii. 24.) ? “ Who, in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears ” (Heb. v. 7.) ; and who, since his ascension, “ ever liveth to make intercession for us ” (Heb. vii. 5.) ? Christian, how can we put any limit to our labours, our gifts, our prayers, in His service ?

Each hour of our Christian life increases our obligations to him, for long suffering with our remaining sin, for fresh grace to resist temptation, endure trial, and do our work ; for new knowledge of Christian doctrine, new manifestations of divine favour, new expectations of eternal life ; for repeated and increasing opportunities of usefulness, with grace to improve them. Therefore, so far from becoming weary in well-doing, or praying, or giving for the good cause of salvation, every hour should find our zeal in all these means enlarging and more cheerful. Our first love

should be warm, but each day it should be warmer; and our light "shining brighter and brighter, unto the perfect day."

True repentance is a most practical thing. It lies not in tears and regrets, though well may we weep over the past; nor in ecstasies and promises, though well may we rejoice, and resolve upon a better obedience; but it is to be seen, by the divine grace of the Holy Spirit, in our active usefulness, in a resemblance to the God of mercy, and in a following of Christ, the Saviour of sinners.

It rules the whole conduct; not merely in our prayers, or other devotional services, or Sundays, or our hours of religious thought; but always, in all that we do, in the house or by the way, in our business or our rest, consecrating us entirely to the glory of God, in serving our fellow sinners.

It is operative through our whole lives; not merely in the distresses which usually accompany conversion, but more and more powerful the longer we live, the more we experience of divine grace,

and the nearer we approach to heaven. Even then, though the sorrows of repentance shall be over, the fruits of repentance will abound in an unending and constant service of Him who sits upon the throne.

Happy they, who, in such repentance, have the earnest of eternal life! But, Oh! let us remember the awful reverse: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!"

IX.

THE EXHORTATION OF THE PENITENT.

(CONTINUED.)

“LET Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

These verses describe, not only, as we have seen, the earnest desire of every true penitent for the salvation of his fellow sinners, to which he is moved by his regard for their souls, his own soul, and the glory of God; but also the language of his whole life, which is a continual exhortation to

faith in God, as the God of salvation. This may be farther opened by considering:

Whom he exhorts; *what* he exhorts them to; and *how* he exhorts them.

First: Whom he exhorts.

Israel. "Let Israel hope," &c.

Secondly: What he exhorts them to.

"*Hope in the Lord;*" for the several reasons assigned.

Thirdly: How he exhorts them.

This we may gather from the tenor of the psalm, and from other Scriptures.

First: Whom he exhorts. "Let *Israel* hope in the Lord."

When the psalm was written, the covenant of God's mercy was, as yet, revealed only to the children of Abraham, Israel according to the flesh. "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29.), was not made fully manifest until the fulness of times (Gal. iv. 4.), when that dispensation began, which is to

“gather together in Christ all things in heaven and in earth” (Ephes. i. 10.), and, especially, to make Jews and Gentiles one by the body of Christ upon the cross (Ephes. ii. 13–16.); since which enlargement of the divine mercy, all who are Christ’s, and only they, whether Jews or Gentiles, are “Abraham’s seed, and children according to the promise” (Gal. iii. 28, 29.). The ancient believer, therefore, when he exhorted to faith in God, and obedience to his commandments, addressed himself to Israel, who had the law and the promises (Rom. iii. 1.).

Upon the same principle, the Christian believer exhorts the true spiritual Israel, even all those who receive by faith that gospel of salvation which is preached unto every creature (Luke xxiv. 47.), God’s most holy “church” (Ephes. i. 23.).

It is, however, but too evident from the sacred narrative, that, under the former dispensation, “all were not Israel, that were called Israel”

(Rom. ix. 6.). Often the whole nation, with exceptions so few as to be scarcely discernible, went into idolatry; even when there was no such open lapse, and the people externally worshipped according to the covenant, there were very many whose "hearts were not right toward God," and who had no genuine faith in the law or the promises. An exhortation addressed to Israel, was not, therefore, necessarily confined to the pious among them; but we hear the prophets often calling upon Israel to repent and turn unto the Lord, and rebuking them for their ungrateful and perilous impiety. In the verses before us, the whole congregation of Israel, assembled for the temple worship, are exhorted to hope in the Lord. It is, then, the proper interpretation of the text, to consider the true penitent as exhorting the people of God to hope in the Lord; and not only them, but all those also whom he desires to become God's people; all who, having the gospel in their hands, or sounding in their ears,

know, and ought to pursue, the way of salvation.

The Christian penitent exhorts the people of God, because they are subject to many trials, which bear hard upon their faith, and many temptations and infirmities, which expose them to sin. It is his duty to comfort his believing brethren with such gracious words of encouragement (1 Thess. iv. 18: v. 11.), and to exhort them "daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. iii. 13.). This is one of the great ends of Christian fellowship; for we are "members one of another" (Rom. xii. 5.), that we may have a tender sympathy and common interest. God gives each his individual experience of grace, not for himself alone, but that he may share his lessons of profit with his brethren in Christ; and, indeed, next to the word of God itself, the Holy Spirit uses no means more efficiently for our Christian edification, than the counsel of fellow Christians from their own heart-

history. It is when we know how they have been comforted under sorrow, made victorious over temptation, and, with infirmities like our own, carried forward by divine grace, that we are encouraged to trust in the same almighty strength, which has made them strong. The Christian has a personal interest in the edification of his fellow Christians. It reacts upon his own. For one member of Christ cannot prosper or suffer, without the other members prospering or suffering with it. Their prayers, their example, their counsel, bless him in return. We are sympathetic beings, and Christianity does not destroy our nature, but uses it for our good. It is natural that we be stronger when others are strong around us, that we be more zealous when others are zealous, more prayerful when others are prayerful. When we are indifferent to the spiritual profit of our brethren, no wonder that we grow cold to our own best good. For, as the apostle says: "The whole body fitly joined

together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love" (Ephes. iv. 16.).

It is also to the church that God has committed the instrumentality, which is to manifest his glory unto the world. They are "the lights of the world" (Matt. v. 13.), like stars in the night, deriving their radiance from the great Sun of Righteousness, whom they see, but the world does not. They are the "salt of the earth," purifying and preserving it from greater corruption, to which it is constantly prone. But if the light grow dim, or the "salt lose its savour," where are the hopes of the world? Hence you find the great stress of the apostles' preaching, like that of the Master's, was not to unconverted men, but to disciples. If the spiritual welfare of Christians be secured, the conversion of sinners is certain. It is for this reason, that we call those

precious seasons in which many are turned unto God, *revivals* of religion. Religion is not revived in the heart of the recent convert; it never existed there before; but the revival of Christian zeal, which had grown cold, is the occasion and means of increased conversion to Christ from the world. Perhaps it is a mistake of modern piety, to be directing its energies so exclusively and immediately to the conversion of the impenitent. This, though a grand duty, is not our only or paramount duty. The edification of those already in the church, the guarding of the young, the reclaiming of the wandering, the comforting of the discouraged, the gentle rebuke of the erring, and bearing with the weak, are the more effectual ways of accomplishing a general good. Every Christian, whose zeal is successful in reviving our piety, becomes, by God's grace, our cheerful and efficient fellow labourer. In his life, we have a new testimony to the power of God's grace; in his prayers, a new reason to expect the divine blessing; and in

his liberality, new means to carry forward the work of God. Therefore it is, that the Holy Spirit insists so much upon Christians helping, exhorting, and sustaining one another. For if one member of the body be sick, the health of the whole fails; if one be deformed, the beauty of its symmetry is impaired; and if one be corrupt, the mortification will extend to all; the glory of God's grace will not be so manifest, nor will sinners be constrained to render praise to his name. Thus every true penitent exhorts God's true "Israel" to "hope in the Lord."

But his zeal is not confined to the people of God. As was shown in the last chapter, he is moved to seek the conversion of men unto God by the love he bears to their souls, his own soul, and the glory of his God. He considers himself chosen and called to this great work of doing good to men, and honouring God; and that this is the most efficient method, by divine grace, of securing his spiritual advancement now, and his

heavenly glory hereafter. While men remain out of God's Israel, they are lost, their influence is to lead others to death, and to dishonour God. Therefore, he would have all men Christians; all partakers of the blessedness he enjoys; all labourers with him in the work of God; all Christians. As far as eternity exceeds time, the immortal soul the frail perishing flesh, and the glories of heaven are above the agonies of hell, so far above every other engagement the duty of saving souls is, in his sight, important.

So much as he is indebted to the grace of God for his own conversion and growth in grace, does he feel himself bound to serve God in the great work of saving souls; and, as his experience of religion is another, and to him the most convincing evidence of its truth, so does he tell of God's grace to his own soul, not in ostentation, but grateful humility, that he may persuade them also to "taste and see that the Lord is good." In a word, he proves that he is Christ's, and has

Christ's Spirit, by his following of Christ in the great work of salvation.

This, however, having been treated of at large before, what was then said need not be repeated, but we may pass on to enquire,

Secondly: What he exhorts to.

"Let Israel *hope in the Lord*: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

"*Hope in the Lord.*" This is the duty and privilege to which the penitent exhorts all his fellow sinners, and he gives the several reasons why sinners should hope in the Lord.

He does not confine this hope to any one thing as its object. It is simply "*hope in the Lord*:" yet as the Lord is the overflowing fountain of all good and blessing and life, so to hope in the Lord implies a confident expectation of receiving from the Lord all that a sinful creature needs, and all that a Christian should desire.

But how may we hope in the Lord? Are we not sinners? Do we not deserve His wrath, who will not allow sin to go unpunished? How may a sinner hope in the Lord?

Ah! the penitent answers; I too am a sinner, by nature and practice, plunged in the depths of sin, and guilt, and corruption; but I cried unto the Lord; I acknowledged my transgressions unto him, and did not hide my iniquity (Ps. xxxii. 5.); for well I knew, that if He were "strict to mark iniquity, I could not stand;" but, blessed be his name! I found that there was "forgiveness with him, that he might be feared." Therefore, I say unto Israel: "Hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy."

The mercy of the Lord is the great argument with the sinner to turn unto him. This mercy is in Christ Jesus to all who will receive it. How great must have been the purpose of God to save sinners, when he gave his only begotten Son? How ready must he be to save sinners, now that

the righteousness of Christ has been wrought out, his blood shed, and he lives to plead at the right hand of God for the salvation of sinners? How perilous the condition, and dreadful the doom of the impenitent soul, when nothing less than the infinite merit and power of Christ could suffice to save a single soul? Whichever way you regard it, there is no argument like the mercy of God in Christ, to win a soul to him. Thus the Saviour preached, thus his apostles preached, thus the evangelical church of all ages has preached, and thus every true penitent exhorts. It is mercy that convicts, and mercy that converts. Never do we see our sin in its true light, until we see it by the light of the cross. What sin to rebel against a God so good, so merciful, and so ready to save? What sin to reject such a Saviour, and to trample upon such blood! Thus the mercy of God through the sufferings of Jesus, breaks the heart with conviction of sin. Then mercy converts. The love of God in Christ draws the soul to him, and,

amidst the agonies of conscious guilt, calls him to hope, assuring him that his sins may be forgiven, and he received as a child of God, renewed unto holiness, and made an heir of everlasting life. Pardon, sanctification, heaven, the love of God, and grace to serve him; these draw the sinner, mourning over his sin, and despairing in his guilt, yet desirous of obeying God, to God in Christ. "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with him there is mercy," says the penitent; there is mercy, for I have found it, sinner that I am, yet sinner saved by grace.

But the convicted sinner may reply again: "Yes, there is mercy, mercy for those who are sinners; but is there for so great a sinner as I? as I, who have no good in me, who try in vain to do right, and sin on? as I, who have abused so much light, and refused so much grace?" Hear what the penitent says: With Him is "plenteous redemption," redemption which has no limit in its riches or its powers; redemption infinite as the

love of God, the merits of Christ, and the energy of the Holy Ghost; not only pardon, but redemption; for Jesus, who is the Saviour, is also the Deliverer. He washes from sin by his blood, He covers the sinner by his righteousness, and He delivers him by his power. Plenteous redemption—redemption for the worst, the guiltiest, the most inveterate sinner, who will accept it from Him. Plenteous redemption—redemption from the thrall of sin, from the corruption of our own natures, the temptations of the world, and the malice of the devil. Grace to will, grace to do, grace to persevere—all that the sinner needs, to become a new creature, is found in this plenteous redemption. Hope then in the Lord, with a confidence that mercy will meet every want, cover every infirmity, strengthen against all temptations. “Yes!” answers the doubting soul again, “there is mercy, plenteous redemption offered to me now: pardon for the past, grace for the future; but I look before me, and I see all along the way

through this world, danger and delusions, and temptations to mortal sin. Shall I be able to maintain my hold upon God? Will not this weak heart falter in its trust, and fall from its hope? May I not disgrace the name of Christ, and come short at last?" "Nay," replies the merciful exhortation, "He shall redeem Israel from *all his iniquities*." This was included before, when the redemption was declared to be plenteous; but here the promise is more particular. It reaches the very trouble of the soul; it removes the last doubt. "Iniquities" are, indeed, our worst enemies. The iniquities that lie, it may be, latent and dormant in the heart, ready to assume baleful power at the call of the tempter; deliverance from ourselves, from our weaknesses, from our corruption, from the deceitfulness of our hearts. It is no tidings of salvation to tell us, that we shall find mercy in the end, if we may be left to our own strength before the end; then we shall certainly fall; but He, who undertook our salvation is

almighty ; the fruit of his atoning work is infinite, and the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son has covenanted to give grace to the end, wherever He applies the blood of Jesus. "HE shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." In the beginning of the Christian life, he is our Alpha ; and in the end, we shall find him our Omega. Author of salvation, he is its Finisher. Now the process is begun, and sanctification is not at once complete ; but it shall be. Now some sins may be subdued and other sins yet dwell in us ; but "He shall redeem Israel from *all* his iniquities." The soul that trusts in him, shall have a complete deliverance, an entire victory, a perfect life. Now our sins rise between us and God. They impair the communion we should enjoy with him ; they provoke his chastening rod ; but when all iniquity shall be taken away, then will God's mercy smile without a cloud, the holy soul drink in, pure and unmingled, the joy of his holy presence, and sorrow cease to wring the heart and wound the

spirit, for there will be no use for sorrow, when there is an end of sin.

Thus the penitent exhorts us to *hope in God*, to hope in God *only*, to hope in God's *mercy* only, to hope in God's mercy only *through Christ*, and to hope *to the end*. The redemption is "with him," not with ourselves; the redemption is "plenteous," abundant for all our want; the redemption shall be complete "from all our iniquities."

O! precious grace of God our Saviour, in Christ Jesus our Lord! Now it invites us to pardon; for all our life it promises us grace; and then, it opens heaven, holy, joyful and high, as the safe rest of our souls for evermore. What blessedness there is in such a hope! How gladly should we accept such mercy! how confidently rely upon such grace! how patiently, zealously, and cheerfully hold out to the end. IT FINDS US IN THE DEPTHS—IT EXALTS US TO THE SKIES.

X.

THE EXHORTATION OF THE PENITENT.

(CONTINUED.)

RELIGIOUS PROFESSION.

How does the penitent exhort?

I. By an open acknowledgment of the grace of God to his own soul, *a public profession* of his faith, and hope, and joy in Christ.

This is the design of the whole psalm. It is a proclamation to assembled Israel, before the whole congregation of worshippers, that the penitent is a sinner saved by grace, through faith in the divine forgiveness, and that his expectation of eternal life is strong and confident.

Such an open confession our beloved Master requires us to make in the use of his holy sacraments, which are appointed for the purpose of giving us an opportunity to make a formal declaration, that we know by experience his religion is true, and that we solemnly separate ourselves from the world, to his holy service, in fellowship with those who bear his name. How clearly this is enjoined upon us as the immediate duty of every sincere penitent, we may learn from many Scriptures, but especially from that very strong passage given by several evangelists: "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. x. 32, 33.).

If you will refer to the connexion in which this passage stands, you will find that our Lord had been giving to the twelve their first commission as preachers of his gospel. He has encouraged them

by promises, that his Spirit would be with them to give them hearts of courage and words of power; that his providence would watch over them as his very precious ones, and that at the last they would receive an abundant, eternal reward for all their labours and sufferings in his cause. At the same time he does not hide the fact, that their office would be one of great peril; and that, as the disciples of a Master despised by the world and about to suffer a shameful death, they must expect to meet with wrong, contempt and persecution. But, lest any might shrink from the danger and death, in the face of which their confession of Christ was to be made, he tells them plainly, that he will acknowledge none to be Christians in the next world, who do not avow themselves to be Christians in this. There can be no misunderstanding his language. Whatever may be our respect for Christianity, our belief of its truth, or our supposed enjoyment of its comfort, unless we have made our religion known by any

open profession of it before men, he will declare before his Father in heaven that we are none of his. Now, if such a profession was absolutely required then, amidst the bitter trials of the early church, how much more are we bound to make it at a time when Christians are treated by the world with respect rather than violence? An open profession of faith in Christ is, therefore, essential to Christian character now, and to a good hope through grace of the life which is to come.

It is due to the world. As the followers of Christ, we are bound to seek the salvation of our fellow men. Nor will our desires or prayers, however earnest, be enough; we must make personal, active, zealous efforts to advance the great work. "He that gathereth not with Christ, scattereth abroad." It is equally clear, that our exertions should be made in the way God has appointed. For as we are his servants, we are bound to do his work in the way He chooses to have it done, and not in that we may think best. It pleased God in earlier

times to make known his will by angels and inspired prophets, and often to confirm their testimony by striking miracles. He might, if He chose, in our time, send through the world a multitude of radiant messengers from heaven to preach his gospel; and cause us daily to see such works of divine power as Moses, and Jesus, and the apostles wrought. But such is not his choice. He has completed the revelation of truth necessary for the salvation of the world, in the sacred canon of Scripture. He abundantly avouched Christianity to be his, by miracles at its beginning. He now employs men, themselves converted sinners, in the advancement of his cause. The manifest agency by which the world is to be brought back to God, is human. Christians are the "lights of the world," "the salt of the earth," "witnesses for God," "epistles of Christ," and "temples of the Holy Ghost." The truth He has already given, repeated by their lips, diffused by their zeal, and illustrated by their

examples, is to save the world. Its efficiency is from God, by the blessing of the Holy Ghost, but the agency is in no sense supernatural, except as Christians are moved, strengthened and guided by the Holy Ghost, through the truth, which has been revealed in the word of God alone. This agency He has promised to bless, and has blessed. No servants of his have been so successful, as humble, converted sinners, who have used the gospel, relying upon its sufficiency, by the divine blessing, to convert their fellow sinners. No miracles have been, or could be, more convincing than the transformations wrought by that gospel in the hearts and lives of sinful men. The responsibility of a world's salvation, therefore, rests upon those whom He has converted and called to be his servants in the gospel.

Now, is it not plain, that the faith of a Christian, to be of use in the world, should be known? and how can it be known except it be avowed? If the gospel, by divine power, has changed his heart,

and made his life better, how shall it have due credit for its sanctifying grace, except he testifies before men that he has been born of God? If, rejoicing in assurance of pardon and the love of God, he desires to recommend the gospel of his hope to his fellow sinners, how can he do so, with any appearance of honesty or likelihood of success, while he refuses to take part himself openly with Christ's people, and record his vows of service to God? God does not give us our religion for ourselves alone; but that, while it blesses us, it may by us bless the world. The light of hope, which He has kindled in our hearts, was meant to cheer others, and guide them in the way of truth; how dare we cover it up and hide it from men's eyes? The healing balm, which has given life to our broken hearts, should shed its fragrance all around, that others may be led to apply the same remedy. Our religion belongs to the world. We rob our fellow sinners so long as we keep it from them.

If, therefore, we postpone a profession of religion, we are very guilty, because we trifle with the souls of our fellow sinners. So far as our conduct has an influence, we encourage them to sin on and neglect Christ. We are responsible for their danger, it may be for their eternal ruin. None can tell how much good the concealed penitent might do, if he were an open Christian; but it is certain that he does much evil as he is. It is difficult to discharge the obligations of a Christian, but Christ has pledged himself to help all those who take up his cross; and, until we bear it openly, we have no promise to lean upon, while our obligations are not the less that we do not avow ourselves Christians, because we ought to avow ourselves on his side. Be assured, that Christ, who pities the world and loves to save sinners by the instrumentality of such as we are, will not deal lightly with us, if we thus deny our aid to his good cause.

It is due to the Church. To the Church, as we

have seen, is committed the great work of converting the world. The burthen of this duty is immense, and Christians need all the sympathy, comfort and encouragement under it, that they can receive. The greatest of all encouragements, next to the promise of God, is seeing the success of their labours in the gospel. It was among our Lord's most bitter trials that he was rejected of men; that when he called, none answered; and that all day long he stretched forth his hand, and no man regarded. So does the Christian's heart faint in the time when few avow themselves penitents; while there is no joy this side of heaven like "the joy of harvest," when the work of the Lord is prospering in our hands. The angels in the presence of God are glad over one sinner that repenteth; but they have not the joy of the Christian who has been the instrument of bringing that penitent out of his peril. For you, reader, the Church has been praying; Christians have been exhorting you by word and example to secure the

salvation of your soul ; if you have received any good influence from religion, it has been, among other means, through their prayers and exertions. Do you owe them no return ? Should you not make their hearts glad by declaring that you too will be one of Christ's people, a witness of his grace, and a crown of their rejoicing ? O how their hearts yearn over you ! How they long and look for your coming out from the world, to take your place with them at the sacramental table ! Shall they look again, and be again disappointed ?

Christians have a great work to do, and there are but few of them to do it. They need help, open, honest, avowed help. Every new accession to their number, every fresh labourer, that comes in answer to their prayers for more labourers in the vineyard, cheers their spirits. They work with renewed energy, because in you they see that they have one opponent the less, and one fellow labourer more, whose sympathy, prayers, and counsel, they may count upon. Will you

not give them help to bear their burdens, rejoice with them in their joy, and weep with them in their sorrow? Do you not owe it to them for the Master's sake, whom they serve, and their own? You may think that you do sympathize with them, pray with them, and even labour with them in your concealed religion; but they know nothing of what you hide from their eyes. As a secret friend, you are little better than an open enemy. Oh! come out of your hiding place and make their hearts glad!

The Church has many enemies, who are continually reviling and opposing the cause of Christ. Is it then, generous in you to shrink from the reproach which your brethren are bearing for their Master's sake, who bore "the contradiction of sinners against himself" for you? Perhaps the worst, certainly the most dangerous, enemies of the Church, are in her own bosom. You see how the good cause languishes from the inconsistency of professors, and the malignant slanders

of the world. You believe the Church to be right. You mourn over the bickerings, the uncharitableness, the worldliness of those who call themselves Christians. You know the testimony which Christians should give to the world. Come forward then and give it. Show the world, by the grace of Christ which is promised to you, what a Christian is. Do you say, that you fear you yourself would fail in Christian duty, and perhaps bring dishonour upon the Christian name? Fail, you certainly would, were you to attempt it in your own strength; but are you not more sure to fail, when you will not use the means appointed to keep you steadfast? Christ has covenanted to be the strength of those who live near him, and keep their trust in him; but you neither draw nigh to him nor rely upon him, while you refuse to follow him openly. Now you do dishonour him; you do impede his cause; you are with those who reject, and revile, and oppose him; for though you take no active part in the opposition, you will

not come out from among his enemies, and take your place among his friends. If all were to act as you do, there would be no Church, no Sabbath, no sacraments, no Christian name; and thus, so far as your conduct goes, you are verily guilty of destroying all the means of grace.

It is due to yourself. You are not only to believe in Christ, that you may be saved; but to “*work out* your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. ii. 12.). A profession of faith in Christ is not merely an entrance upon a Christian life, but the means of strengthening and animating us in it. For this reason, the sacramental board is crowned with bread, the emblem of nourishment, and wine, the emblem of joy. It is the means which Christ has divinely appointed; and, as has been observed, you have no right to expect his gracious furtherance in your endeavours after a holy life, except you use the means of his appointment, any more than you can expect strength of body without using food and drink.

An open profession of faith will strengthen your inward resolutions. You will be no longer a wavering, undecided thing ; afraid to follow the world into sin, and yet afraid to avow your choice of better principles. Confess yourself candidly a servant of Christ ; a weak, imperfect, sinful servant, it may be, but an honest, well-meaning, well-endeavouring one. You will then have more respect for yourself as a religious person. You will feel the force of your position before the world ; and, bearing the name of Christ, you will be more careful, lest that holy name be abused through your negligence or wrong. You will have a thousand promises to rest upon that you have not now ; for every promise made to the Church you will share in. You will have the benefit of many thousand prayers, that you have not now ; for every prayer for the Church, breathed by Christians in private or public throughout the world, will be put up for you. You will have the sincere love, sympathy, counsel and good company

of all God's true people; for they will know you, greet you, and hold fellowship with you as one of Christ's family.

The precious doctrines of Christ's incarnation, passion and power, are the bread of life and the wine of the kingdom to the believer in Jesus. Except we so eat his flesh and drink his blood, there is no life in us (John vi. 48-59.); but these precious doctrines are made to pass before the believer in the sacrament of the supper, with peculiar clearness. He is led, as it were, to the very foot of the cross; he sees the body of Jesus broken in the breaking of the bread, and the blood of Jesus shed in the out-pouring of the wine; and the emblems, so significantly expressive of those spiritual realities, are presented to him personally, that partaking of them himself, he may know the atonement was made for him, by appropriating its benefits to his own soul. He is thus by faith a participator of Christ's grace, a member of his blessed body, an heir of immortal glory with

Christ his elder Brother. Every time the sacrament is repeated, his vows are repeated, his faith strengthened, his hope exalted, his zeal inspired; for, though he may sometimes, like the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, walk in doubt and heaviness, mourning the absence of his Lord, he will not long be left thus, for Christ delights to make himself known in the breaking of bread (Luke xxiv. 13-32.).

Hence it is the experience of every believer, that a proper use of the sacramental supper, eminently contributes to his edification and Christian enjoyment; not because then only he relies on Christ, or has communion with him, (which he may do when alone, or with the church, or even when in the world); but because at the holy table there is a concentration of his privileges, a solemn confirmation of his faith and hope, with a foretaste of the heavenly feast. Therefore, he longs for an opportunity of meeting with Christ and his people at the family board; he goes in the strength of its refreshment many days; and longs

after another like season, for the renewal of his satisfaction ; the successive sacraments marking successive stations, as he advances from strength unto strength, until he appears before God in Zion above (Ps. lxxxiv. 7.).

O my friend, you need grace to subdue your sins, to remove your doubts, to console your sorrow, to assist the Church, to save the souls of sinners around you ; refuse not then the grace, which may be yours by an open profession of your faith in Christ at his holy table!

It is due to Christ. Ah! dear reader, can we ever do enough for him, who has done, is still doing, and will do throughout eternity, so much for us? If you have any faith in him, any love for him, you will say, that all you are and have, is too poor a return for his eternal, priceless love. It is but little at the best, that you can do for him ; but you can make a profession of your faith in him, and love to him ; and, except you do this, He declares that you do nothing which he will or can accept

at your hands. Will you not render Him this slight service ; slight in the pains it costs, but precious in his sight and in its consequences ?

Consider that it is his positive command. It is that acknowledgment of your allegiance to him, which, as the Lord of the Church, and the Master who has redeemed you to himself as one of his peculiar people, he insists upon from you. His design was, that thus a visible exhibition of his spiritual Church should be made to the world ; nor are we without frequent proof that the celebration of his dying love by his people, as they gather themselves among the emblems of his passion, is employed by the Holy Ghost as a means peculiarly adapted to convert the careless, and peculiarly blessed. Not to join in it, then, is to withhold your co-operation from the edifying service, and to cast oblivion over the cross.

It is a most affectionate command. He does not bid us remember his avenging power, his wrath against the wicked, or even his absolute

right to our obedience; but his love, the claims he has upon us as friends, as sinners whom he has saved by his devotion for us. It is not a requisition of labour or penance, but of love to Him in the enjoyment of his love to us. It is an invitation to sit with Him and his people in close confidential fellowship at a feast of love; to receive upon our own souls the application of his saving grace; to join ourselves to him in an everlasting covenant, closely, vitally, as the members of a living body are united to its living head. He declares that he delights in having us near him, in holding familiar conversation with us, in imparting to us his truth, like heavenly bread, in pouring out to us his joy, like the wine of God's vineyard, and in giving us foretastes of the everlasting feast which he has prepared for the redeemed above.

Death is ever solemn, and few are so insensible as not to listen attentively when the dying speak, or not to consider their wishes then expressed, as

peculiarly binding; but our best and truest Friend gave us this command when He saw the hour approaching in which he would die the bitterest, shamefullest death that ever wrung a mortal body or an immortal spirit, to deliver us from eternal death, and open for us life everlasting by his own extreme anguish and humiliation. It is the special service, which He ordained with his latest breath, for the perpetuation of his memory by the friends he left on earth, when he ascended to heaven.

The Lord of glory offers to acknowledge you, sinner and child of the dust as you are; will you not acknowledge the Lord of glory? He shrank from no trials, that he might purchase the right to offer you salvation; will you not undertake the honourable trials of an open Christian life for Him? It may bring upon you some reproaches from a wicked world, but Oh! what shame and contempt He bore for you! Do you not desire to be one of that blessed, shining throng, who shall stand around his throne, and bless his name with

harp and hallelujah for ever? Yet you hear that He says, he will deny you before his Father, if you deny him by not confessing him before men.

You owe it to Christ. He enjoins this profession on you for the love He bears to dying sinners, whom you should lead to his cross; for the love He bears to his Church, which you should cheer by your example and aid with your zeal; for the love He bears to your own soul, the edification of which you should endeavour after by all the means of grace; for the love He bears to his own holy name, which you should vindicate from a scoffing world.

You will have many excuses rising in your mind: You feel yourself too unworthy for such a vow; but all the worthiness He asks is a confession of your own unworthiness, and a reliance on his infinite righteousness for acceptance.

You fear that you will not act up to your profession; but He promises you all needed grace, and his strength is sufficient for you.

The inconsistencies of professing Christians stumble and discourage you ; but it is your business to save your own soul, and to show by divine help the true effects of Christian faith.

You are sometimes tempted to doubt whether you are a Christian at all ; but if you are not, it is high time you should be ; and the want of religion is a greater argument for your attempting to gain it by divine help.

Whatever you may urge, changes not the positiveness of the command, or the truth of the declaration, that if you confess him not, He will not acknowledge you.

It may now seem a slight thing to withhold such a profession ; but will it be a slight thing to stand confounded in that day, when Christ shall deny you before his Father and the holy angels, and the glorified church, because you denied him ?

And, Oh ! remember, that if it be your duty to make a profession of faith, to postpone it is a grievous sin. Let not a single sacrament pass

by without improving it; for, though you may have a hundred more opportunities, there will be on your conscience the heavy guilt of having broken a command of Christ, neglected a privilege of grace, and refused a testimony to religion. Can you be a true penitent, and thus wilfully increase your guilt?

XI.

THE EXHORTATION OF THE PENITENT.

(CONTINUED.)

RELIGIOUS EXAMPLE.

II. THE penitent exhorts by his life.

As we have already seen, God employs the instrumentality of Christians for the building up of his Church, and the conversion of the world. Their Christian virtues, which are the fruit of his grace, are the proofs of his converting and sanctifying power. This is the idea of the apostle Peter, when, in his first Epistle (ii. 9.), he says to his fellow Christians: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises

(*energies*) of Him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Believers are "the leaven cast into the lump," which should diffuse itself "until the whole is leavened;" nor should the weakness of the instrumentality detract from our zeal or courage, for it is through our weakness that the strength of Christ is made perfect and manifest (2 Cor. xii. 9.); as the apostle asserts: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. iv. 7.).

A profession of religion, therefore, does not constitute a religious life; but is an avowal of our purpose to live, by the grace of Christ, according to the commandment and example of Christ. Our faith must be confessed, but its genuineness must be shown by our works (James ii. 17-26.); "for with the heart man believeth *unto righteousness*, and with the mouth confession is made *unto salvation*" (Rom. x. 10.). As God not only declares himself to be the Creator in his word, but demon-

strates his glorious attributes by his works ; so not only does he declare himself to be the Re-Creator of the soul, but demonstrates his sanctifying grace by the believer's works : " for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God had before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephes. ii. 10.). If, then, the end of our original creation, be the glory of God, how much more is it the end of our new creation unto spiritual life? and how is our duty to live for his glory, enhanced by the price of our redemption, the blood of Christ, and the riches of our inheritance above the skies? A mere profession of belief in certain doctrines, will be of little profit to our fellow men, and little glory to God ; since the avowed design of the gospel is to make men better, and to prepare them by a good life on earth, for an eternal life of holiness in heaven. Holy principle in the heart will manifest itself in the outward conduct. We know a man to be honest or charitable, not by his pro-

fessions, but by his honest and charitable actions; so we know a man to be a Christian only by his acting like Christ. "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk even as He walked" (1 John ii. 6.). Our beloved Master not only taught the truths of his holy religion, but exhibited in his own conduct the virtues which he enjoined, "leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter ii. 21, 22.); so are we not only to profess and spread the truth, but also to prove by our example, the purity, holiness, gentleness, and goodness of the Christian character. Men may or may not read the Scriptures, or listen to the preaching of the gospel; they may or may not give their minds to the consideration of the truth, sufficiently for the understanding of it; but, when a Christian before their eyes lives like a Christian, the truth is forced upon their attention, and by a concise logic they are constrained to admit, that the tree must be good

which bears such good fruit. Nay, the very people, who, from levity of disposition, or weakness of mind, are the least likely to reason closely about religion, are the most likely to be affected by the conduct of those around them. Hence the false maxim, "Example is better than precept," derives no little plausibility from the fact, that the greater part of the world are more easily led through imitation, than governed by authority and principle. We are to avail ourselves of this imitativeness in human nature, by leading good lives, while we check its evil by openly professing that all our good is derived from God. Were a man, acting in other respects from right principles, to conceal his belief of the gospel, his conduct would be rather against religion than for it, as showing that it was not necessary to a good life; but, having declared himself to be a Christian, sinful and weak by nature, yet relying upon the grace of the Holy Ghost, all his good works become proofs of the gospel's sanctifying power;

while his evil doings are as manifestly inconsistencies with his profession. If he be cheerful, patient and resigned, amidst the trials and difficulties of the world, men are struck with the contrast to their own conduct, and trace the difference to his religion. If he be kind, gentle and courteous, meek under insult and forgiving wrong, where the natural temper would be selfish, irascible and revengeful; men mark the change, and see in it the transformation of grace. If he deny himself, living above the world, resisting its temptations, and ever crucifying his lower tendencies, men will recognize him as a pilgrim through earth to a better country, and, therefore, content with little here, in the hope of a glorious satisfaction hereafter. If he be affectionately earnest in recommending the Saviour he has found, to his fellow sinners, that they also may become partakers with him of the same blessed, sanctifying hope; men will acknowledge the honesty of his creed, and the benevolent zeal which it inspires.

Hence, ever since the first promulgation of Christianity, it has had its greatest successes when Christians have been most devoted to the practical duties of Christianity. It is comparatively in vain, that the preacher declares the truth, if the lives of the church do not answer to his declarations. The oft quoted couplet of the ethical poet:

“For modes of faith let senseless bigots fight,
His can’t be wrong whose life is in the right”—

is self-contradictory; for it first assumes, that faith has no practical controul over the life, and then asserts that a right life can only proceed from a right faith. If a right faith be necessary to a right life, we should search, and even contend for it; but, on the other hand, while we avow the right faith, we should be zealous to prove that it is right by the rectitude of our practice. Faith and works are inseparably connected, for as there can be no faith without works, so there can be no works without faith. The error lies in attempt-

ing to consider them apart from each other. When the avowal of faith in Christ and the practice of Christ's precepts go together, they are as irresistible as moral means can be.

Our Saviour, in the Sermon on the Mount, illustrates this doctrine by a figure so apt and impressive, that we cannot do better than devote a little time to its study: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill, cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 14-16.).

First: It is affirmed, that the disciples of Christ have light. Light is sometimes put for knowledge or truth, in opposition to the darkness of ignorance or error; and sometimes for holiness in opposition to the darkness of sin. Here both are meant, that is to say, holiness as the result of

belief in the gospel. The true disciple has light, for the effect of the gospel is to "turn us from darkness unto light," which, we learn from the parallelism of the text, is "from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts xxvi. 18.); and the apostle Peter, in an afore-cited passage, speaks of our being "called out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. ii. 9.). The light of the Christian is not original with him; but he is as a candle lighted by another hand, and from another burning luminary, for the purpose of giving light. Our blessed Lord is the true Light (John i. 9.), sent from "the Father of lights." He says of himself: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12.); "For," says the apostle, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6.). His disciples are intended to be

as so many lesser lights, deriving their shining property from him. For, although Jesus Christ is the true Light, shining for the glory of God in their salvation, the greater number of men are still in darkness. He has arisen upon his Church "with healing in his wings," but not on the whole world, as He will shine in his millennial noon-day splendour; but as the stars, far above the earth, catch the light of the sun and reflect it upon us, so believers in the elevation of their faith, receive and reflect upon others the rays of Christ shed upon their souls. The light is called our own, in the sense that it is entrusted to us; but still it is the light of Christ, entrusted to us for the special purpose of the divine glory in the enlightening of our fellow-men. For

Secondly: We are to "let our light shine." It is the property of light to shine. We could not define light better than as, That which shines. Indeed, if our criticism were nice, we should find, that the word rendered *light*, is a derivative of the

verb, to shine, and not the verb a derivative from the noun. Light must shine. The smallest spark, the slightest twinkle is in contrast to darkness, though obstacles may be put between it and the eye to hinder its being seen. So certainly will holy principle, when manifested, be distinguished from the ungodliness of the world. We may also cause or suffer our light to grow dim or go out, for as we said before, it is entrusted to our care. Thus a flame, to burn freely, must be fed, and the oil of holy principle is the truth. When, therefore, the disciple neglects to study and meditate upon the doctrines of salvation, he refuses to let his light shine as it should. A lamp needs to be trimmed. The oil must be carefully guarded from admixture with other matter, or the wick becomes thickened and clogged. So, though divine wisdom comes from above, pure (James iii. 17.), there is much sin in the heart, which, unless we take great care, will mingle with it and dim its brightness. The glass or medium within which a

flame burns, may be clouded by foul breath, or an accumulation of dust, and thus its lustre be obstructed; so, when there is some divine grace in the heart, a Christian may allow worldly feeling, or an acquisition of worldly things to diminish the beneficial effects of his religion on the world. A lamp may even be well filled, well trimmed, and very bright, yet placed in such a position that no one can see it; like a candle under a bushel-measure, when the house will be as dark, as if there were no light at all; nay, as soon as the portion of the confined air necessary to combustion is exhausted, it will go out. Thus a Christian (if such a thing were possible) may so withdraw himself from his fellow-men, refusing to manifest his religion by his practice, that no one will take notice of him, and all the benefit of his religion be lost; while such is the nature of Christian principle, that without exercise in the relative duties of life, it will wane away and die of itself. In this way the end of

grace may be frustrated so far as our agency is concerned. Therefore our blessed Lord says, that we must not only "let our light shine," but "so shine that men may see our good works."

Thirdly: The motive for this manifestation of Christian principle in holy living, is, "that men glorify our Father which is in heaven." Men do not light a candle for the candle's sake; nor does God cause the sun, and moon, and stars to shine for their own sakes. His glory is the purpose of all that He does; and, in giving light to the Christian, He means that not only the salvation of the Christian himself shall be to his glory, but that his good works may induce others to glorify the source of all light, our Father in heaven. By the demonstrative influence of the good works done by his true disciples, it is his purpose, that his truth shall prevail for the salvation of the world. The light we have is not our own, but entrusted to us for the glory of God; and, therefore, it is a breach of trust (the worst kind of rob-

bery), not to live so that God will receive glory from our lives. The light is not our own, but given to us for a specific purpose. God needs not any return at our hands to himself immediately, but has appointed our fellow-men as the recipients of the tribute due. Their benefit is the channel by which our gratitude and our duty are to reach his throne. They are linked to us by a thousand relations, all derived from and terminating in the heavenly Father of all. Our obligations to God are, therefore, a debt due to the world; as the apostle felt when he said: "I am a debtor to the Greeks and Barbarians, both to the wise and unwise; so, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to them which be at Rome also" (Rom. i. 14-15.). In the same degree that the Christian is sensible of the grace of God towards himself, will his zeal be great for the salvation of sinners, and he will let his light shine for their advantage. He cannot withhold it without robbery; without cheating them of the

good God intended for them by his good works. Therefore, his love for God will awaken in him pity for their sorrows, sorrow for their sins, desire of their happiness here and hereafter. The love of God in his heart will shine through his countenance, distil from his lips, breathe by his prayers, employ his hands, urge his feet, spend his breath, consecrate his time, and exert all his influence, that God may be glorified and man may be blessed. His ambition to glorify his God by his fellow-men goes beyond earth. He lets his light shine, that they may be sanctified unto God, and the mighty cloud of spiritual witnesses, beholding their conversion, may take up a song of universal joy, and distant worlds re-echo the acclamations of praise unto Him, who by his grace of wisdom and power has brought back to himself and to happiness the dead in sin and the lost in guilt.

To take up again the main tenor of our discourse, it is clear, that our lives should be a con-

tinual hymn of praise to God, and a continual exhortation to our fellow-men. No man can claim a secret religion. If it do not show itself by good works for the glory of God in the good of others, it does not exist. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James i. 27.). No one should be at ease, nor think himself secure in a state of grace, except when like his Master he is "going about doing good," and when he perceives that good is done.

It is clear, also, that the Christian should live among men. Separation from the world is enjoined upon us, but that it means separation from the principles and practices of the world, not from our fellow-men, is proved by the example of Jesus Christ, who was continually among men, doing them good by word and deed, while he was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners" (Heb. vii. 26.). Our religion is per-

sonal, and, therefore, to be cultivated in private, personal communion with God; but it is also social, and, therefore, to be exercised in association with our fellow-men. Love to our neighbour as ourselves, is as essential to a Christian spirit, as love to God. If the love of God fill our hearts, it must inspire us with love to our fellow-sinners; for "God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life;" and how can love be known but by its fruits? "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion against him, how dwelleth the love of God in him" (1 John iii. 17.)? This is still more true of spiritual good, which we may impart to the spiritually destitute.

It is among men that our duties lie. There is the vineyard, into which the Master has sent us to work; there the good seed is to be sown; there our light is to shine; there the leaven of

the Church is to work ; and there our Master's example leads us. There, also, is the theatre, on which we are to act our parts for the glory of God ; the field of exercise, where we are to strengthen the powers of our souls for immortal life. It is true, that it is difficult to maintain our character, surrounded by the world's temptations ; yet experience has shown that it is not less, but more difficult to maintain our steadfastness in solitude. If the graces of the Christian character were negative, and it were enough not to do wrong, we might content ourselves in such sluggish dullness ; but, on the contrary, our duties are active, we are to do good, and not to seek the advancement of the divine glory, is sin. Christ has redeemed us for his own "peculiar people," that we might be "zealous of good works." We have no choice in the matter ; but shall find in this, as in every thing else, that the way He marks out for us is best for us ; and that it is safer to be found in the way of duty, than

shrinking from it. We are wrong in running fool-hardily upon temptation; but to desert our duty, that we may escape temptation, is a worse sin than we should be likely to commit by meeting temptation in attempting our duty. Such a course is not holy jealousy, but cowardice, committing greater sin to avoid a less. Even if there be danger, it is what we are forewarned we shall meet. Our Christian life is a fight, which we must overcome in, not fly from. Our divine Lord has promised strength, if we are faithful in his service; and "greater is He that is for us, than all that can be against us." "Finally, my brethren," says that notable champion, who put his own rule fairly to the test, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Ephes. vi. 19.). He has provided for us armour of proof, if we keep our face to the foe, but none if we turn to flight: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against all the wiles of the devil. . . . Wherefore,

take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (13-17 vs.). The coward, who skulks from the post of duty because it is the post of danger, may not wear such honourable insignia of His sacramental host, who is the Captain of our salvation; or, if, having attempted his duty, he becomes alarmed, and turns away, he is sure to receive grievous, perhaps fatal, wounds in his defenceless back. The Lord has promised a crown and a glory worth all the dust and struggles of the conflict: "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. ii. 10.);

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. iii. 21.). The Master’s sorest temptation was in the wilderness, when hungry and alone; his greatest triumphs were won when doing good among men. We need his Spirit, indeed, to keep us safe; but that Spirit is always to be met with, when we are following in his steps. Occasional, frequent, daily retirement from the busy scenes of life, is necessary, to keep the Christian’s temper holy, humble and heavenly; so the Master was wont to retire, that he might refresh his Spirit in communion with his Father; but secret devotion is a means of preparing for a Christian life, not the Christian life itself. Here it is necessary, because of our infirmities and temptations; but above, when the life is perfect, the worship and the service are ever with an innumerable company of saints and angels. Seclusion from the world, to which we are so much tempted when pressed

by difficulties and chagrined by failures, is not the choice for a true penitent. The selfishness of the anchorite, the torpor of the monk, or the fantastic raptures of the quietist, have no place in the Christian's experience. It is putting our candle under a bushel; abstracting the leaven from the lump, the salt from the world; desertion of Christ; robbery of God, robbery of fellow man, and robbery of our own souls.

The whole aim of our lives should be the glory of God in the salvation of sinners, not excluding our own. Our light is to shine, not for our own praise, but the praise of God. If we carry this rule in our hearts, it will uplift us above many temptations, and keep us steadfast in an onward course. Then we shall obey, simply and unhesitatingly, what God commands. There will be no questionings about expediency, no doubt between this or the other methods of doing good, no discouragement because the blessing of success is delayed. As Christ's servants, we will do his work, just as

He orders it to be done; our own judgment has nothing to do with the matter, for His is omniscient and infallible; our personal success is nothing, so that His is sure, for we are united to him, and he rewards according to fidelity in serving; our personal defeats are nothing, for He must triumph in the end, and knows best how to secure his own glory. In a word, we will work only as instruments, whose whole duty lies in using the means according to his directions, leaving to Him the giving of the increase. Then we shall not be fretful and impatient with our fellow Christians or fellow sinners, because they requite ill our attempts to do them good, for our Master bears with them; the Father is long suffering both with them and us; the Holy Spirit continues to strive in their hearts and ours. If God, whose is the glory, be so patient, and so placable, what right have we, his servants, to complain? Alas! how much of our trials, and mortifications, and quarrels, and consequent failures, arise from seeking our own

glory in what we profess to do for the glory of God! How prone we are to frown, when any doubt that our plans are best, or seek to recommend another, or trench upon our dignity, or cross our convenience! If the glory of God were truly our aim, there would be none of this; if the salvation of men were truly our aim, there would be none of it. The same love to God and man which prompts the Christian service, keeps him humble; considerate of another's infirmities, because mindful of his own; meek, because wishing to win; gentle, because anxious to persuade; long suffering, because determined to persevere.

Such a life is, indeed, an exhortation, saying in deed and in temper, more eloquent than words: "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. For He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

Very awful is the Christian's responsibility. His character, his life before the world, is the

testimony of God to the truth of his religion ; the evidence of our favour with him ; the main instrument, next to the promulgation of his truth, by which He chooses to accomplish the salvation of men ; the manifestation of the divine glory in the effects of his gospel.

The Christian is a temple of the Holy Ghost, a shrine in which the sacred fire is deposited, where the sacred lamp burns ; how holy should he be !

He is the light of the world, sent to lead men away from hell, and bring them on towards heaven ; how careful should he be !

He is the instrument of Jehovah's praise, of the Saviour's mercy, of the Spirit's power ; how devoted should he be !

“Wherefore I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies (i. e. your lives on earth) a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. xii. 1.). “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are

honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise; think of these things!" (Phil. iv. 8.). AMEN!

XII.

THE EXHORTATION OF THE PENITENT.

(CONTINUED.)

RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION.

III. THE penitent exhorts by his *words*.

The faculty of articulate speech, is so distinguishing an attribute of human nature, over the lower creation, that the psalmist calls his tongue his “glory” (lvii. 8. cviii. 2.); and the apostle James says, that “the tongue is a little member and boasteth great things.” That which God gave to be the vehicle of thought, affection, entreaty, persuasion and command, must be mighty as to its influences for good or evil.* Hence the

* See the author's Oration before the Students of the Andover Theological Seminary.

importance of governing the tongue is insisted upon by the apostle just cited, through a whole chapter (iii.), and he does not hesitate to say, that if any man “seem to be religious, and ‘bindeth not his tongue,’ that his religion is vain” (i. 26.); while, “if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (iii. 2.). So David resolves: “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth as with a bridle, when the wicked are before me” (xxxix. 1.); and prays: “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (cxli. 3.). Our blessed Lord also says, that the inward character and dispositions of a man show themselves in his talk: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. xii. 34.). The power of speech over the minds of men, is seen in the history of eloquence among the ancients, and the care with which it was cultivated by those ambitious of rule; nor, though the invention of printing has greatly changed the state of things, is its charm lost, for

still both wise and unwise rush to hear the skilful orator, while that style of writing, which most resembles good talking, is ever the most attractive and likely to persuade. In the means of grace, speech has a high place assigned to it. The Son of God, as the shining forth of the divine glory, and the manifest character of the divine Being, by whom God declares himself to us (Heb. i. 1-3.), is officially designated as the WORD. He kindled the lips of the ancient prophets, that by them he might speak to men. He himself, while on earth, was a preacher of righteousness, not merely in addressing crowds, but also in conversation with smaller groups and single persons, making known the truth of his law and grace of his gospel, by the accents of a human tongue, at once so grand, simple, tender, and direct to the heart, that not the least testimony to his manifest divinity, was the report of the Sanhedrim's officers: "Never man spake like this man" (John vii. 46.). After his ascension, He sent down cloven tongues, like as of fire, upon the heads of the human preachers to

whom he had committed his gospel, at once assuring the endowment, and asserting the value of a various and glowing eloquence for the work they had in charge; and it is remarkable, that their written expositions of Christian doctrine are not after the fashion of formal essays, but epistles, resembling so much familiar, though dignified, speech, as to make us feel as though the words came audibly from the sacred page. Still "it pleases" Him, who ever takes the best method of accomplishing his purposes, and who perfectly understands the hearts He has made, "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. i. 21.). It is thus the ordinance of God, that his truth should be best made known by man to man, in the speech of man, with the eye and gesture of a man, the human soul shedding forth its sympathy with kindred souls. That this method of usefulness is not confined to authoritative preaching, we know from the apostolical injunction to "exhort one another daily" (Heb. iii. 13.), as well as from the regard and remembrance which the

Lord had for those, who showed their fear of him and meditation upon his name, by speaking often one to another (Mal. iii. 16.).

1. It is natural that we should talk with those around us, of things important and interesting; that we should offer them advice in difficulties, warning in danger, sympathy in trial, and remonstrance in error; it is, therefore, characteristic of the penitent's better nature, that he should endeavour by his conversation to persuade his fellow sinners from the way of death, and help them in the way of life. It is a means of doing good within the reach of every Christian. If we can speak to our fellow men, we can speak to them of Christ. We should consider it most unfriendly, if we saw their health, or property, or character in jeopardy, and knew how the threatening evil might be averted, yet did not tell them of it; how much more should Christian friendship move us to speak of what concerns their spiritual and eternal well being? We need neither learning nor

eloquence, other than what the grace of God and an earnest honesty will give, for such a service; and when we speak in the spirit of Christ, we may rely upon the grace of Christ to give us words, and our words a proper influence. The Scripture makes the neglect of this faithful office a sign of coldness, amounting to enmity against our fellows: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev. xix. 17.). It is a duty which we owe to God and our brother for Christ's sake, which we cannot omit, without disobedience to express divine commandment, and a criminal neglect of our brother's soul.

It is very wrong to suppose that by Christian exhortation, remonstrance, or advice, we are guilty of forwardness, presumption or intermeddling. We may err in the temper, or manner, but, if the duty be rightly performed, we do right, and may confidently commit the result to God; nor shall we ordinarily fail of winning the esteem, if not the gratitude, of those we exhort, for such friendly

care will bear, in the judgment of any considerate person, the evidence of regard, as well as fidelity. Thus the Wisdom says: "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee" (Prov. ix. 8.); and David invited the righteous to smite him as a kindness, and to reprove him, as an excellent oil, which would not break his head (Ps. cxli. 5.). There is not one instance of a Christian's taking affront at an honest counsel offered to him by a fellow Christian at his side, for a thousand of his being sorely hurt by fault-finding behind his back, or public assaults upon his character; and, although the Wisdom says, also, that a scorner will hate an honest censor, yet in his heart the greatest scoffer must own the genuine kindness of the intention. Impenitent men expect it at our hands, nay, are surprised if we do not address them on the value of religion; and, though they may fly out into anger, it is rather at the truth than at us; but, even if we do meet with rebuff, it is no more than the apostles and prophets, and even Christ our divine Lord, "who endured the contradiction of sinners

against himself," met with; and the object is well worth the risk. We show but little sense of Christ's value, and but little regard for immortal men, if, having ourselves tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Ps. xxxiv. 8.), we are not anxious to tell them what the Lord hath done for our souls (Ps. lxvi. 17.). Nay, it is no small part of God's purpose in converting us, that we should be made useful in converting others; thus David, in the penitential psalm (li. 12, 13.), prays and resolves: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." Nor will opportunity be wanting. A man who has an enthusiasm upon any subject, is scarcely ever at a loss to bring it in the conversation, and his frank earnestness easily overcomes slight obstacles. So should a Christian be full of Christ, and, if he be, out of the fulness of his heart his mouth will speak; when sitting in the house, or walking by the way, in a crowd, or with a single companion. The Master

talked of nothing else but salvation, the danger of missing it, the wisdom of securing it, the advantage of having it; and the more we are like him, the more like his will be our talk.

2. This way of attempting good is well adapted to success. Every man has felt the power of honest rebuke or friendly expostulation, when given face to face. A Christian may have fallen into an error of opinion or practice, which he is not aware of, or at least not to a proper extent, and hence he goes on carelessly without self-reproach in sin, or loses the comfort and advantage he might have from truth. Then, if a kind friend tell him of his fault, it is like a mirror held before his face; he sees the deformity of his conduct; his conscience, stimulated by the external application, recovers its tone; he goes away to think, and, though, it may be, irritated at first, he considers more and more in solitude, or at his devotions, or when awake at night; nor can he shake off the impression until he is convinced of his wrong, even if he

does not forsake it, and respects the truth of his adviser, though he may not confess it.

Each Christian is liable to his peculiar besetting sins, or doubts, or difficulties in the divine life, and these vary from education, temperament, or circumstances. One is better informed on this point, another on that; and thus each may see in his brother what needs to be corrected, while he needs his brother's eyes to discover his own hidden trouble. Each has his own peculiar history, and one may be in great perplexity from not knowing what the other has long since found out by experience; and a kind sympathizing word of counsel will come to him like a revelation from heaven. Each, also, has his peculiar studies of the divine Word, one learning what the other has not, and not having learned what the other has; each is, therefore, able to teach the other, and a combination of their individual knowledge, by a free exchange of thought respecting divine things, will be to the advantage of both. This common stock of grace is the profit de-

rived from a communion of saints. As the early Christians held their worldly goods ready for the use of those who had need, so should penitent souls share freely their spiritual riches; and this cannot be done without a pious interchange of sentiments and counsel. Besides, such mutual exhortation is a great stimulant to activity. It proves to each that he is not alone, but that there are others sympathizing with him, and labouring for the same end; thus provoking emulation and inciting courage, as when workmen, at a moment requiring their highest exertions, call aloud to each other, or soldiers in battle make the air resound with cheers. We all can do more when acting under a general impulse, than when working alone, because we kindle with the warmth of each other's zeal, and are drawn on by each other's example. In our strife against the world, the flesh, and the devil, our arduous duty of urging up the cause of Christ against the declivity of human corruption, we need all the encouragement we can get, and nothing, except the promise of God, or

the Spirit within us, is more animating, than the voices of our brethren exhorting us to put forth our strength with theirs, and promising their strength to ours. Therefore should we be always ready with the thought and exclamation of our text: "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy; and with him there is plentiful redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

So also will the penitent exhort those who are yet out of Christ. He knows the danger they are in; for he was himself in the same depths. He knows the way of escape from it; for Christ has set his feet on the rock of promise. He anticipates the blessedness of heaven, and would fain carry them with him there. All the arguments of human friendship and of divine love, all the terrors of eternal woe, and attractions of eternal glory, urge him to converse with and entreat sinners around him to fly, as he has fled, from the wrath to come, and find refuge, as he has found, in the forgiveness which is with God. How can he dwell under the

same roof, meet in the same church, exchange courteous greetings, or walk side by side with those on whom the wrath of God is resting, and not speak aloud the anxiety of his heart? He can talk with them of business, or pleasure, or science, or politics; how much more should he talk of God and Christ, of death and the judgment, of heaven and of hell? In the same degree that he is penitent himself, will he urge others to repentance; and there is no surer sign of indifference to our own salvation, than a want of sensibility, and correspondent zeal, for the conversion of others.

3. Our success in this duty depends, under God, upon the spirit and manner in which it is performed. The manner will be so regulated by the spirit, that they need not be treated of separately, in laying down a few rules for our government when exhorting others by our words.

We should be kind. It is the good of our fellow men that we seek; their persuasion from what is hurtful to that which will advance the

good of their souls. When such Christ-like affection moves us, it will show itself in our countenance, our spirit and our carriage. They will see it at once, and, at least in their secret hearts, give us credit for good wishes. Bluff, angry language, or a dictatorial, fault-finding manner, will rouse them to resistance, or turn them away in disgust, however true what we say may be; and, on the other hand, the smoothest, most oily words will not hide an improper, or counterfeit a good temper, but render them more indignant at the deceit. We cannot expect to be regarded as friends, if we appear like enemies or traitors. Such was not the manner of Him, who was meek and lowly of heart, who wept over the sinners whom He could not save, and prayed for his murderers on the cross; nor was it the manner of his apostles, who persuaded men to be reconciled to Christ (2 Cor. v. 7.), and wept while speaking of those who were enemies to the cross of Christ (Phil. iii. 18.). We are not judges of our fellow

men, but their fellow sinners, saved, if saved, sanctified, if sanctified, by the same free grace of which we would have them to be partakers ; and, therefore, we should be humble while we are earnest, and meek while we are faithful, and gentle while we are importunate. Surely, if God remembers our infirmities, if the holy Jesus was so patient even when “his own received him not,” if the Holy Spirit is so long suffering, though sorely grieved, it ill becomes us to quarrel with and fret at our fellow sinners, for the very sins we are liable to and have been guilty of, and from which, if sincere, we desire to save them. If my brother in his rude rashness, strike so hard as to break my head, I can scarcely think that he has poured out an excellent oil upon me, or wish for a repetition of the blow ; the natural impulse would be to return it ; or, should grace restrain nature, to get out of his reach. We must show in our exhortations to duty, our readiness to join in what we recommend, asking his assistance to glorify God,

while we pledge him ours. Like a good captain, though without assuming any such rank, we must say, "Come!" not "Go!"

Our exhortations should be wisely considered.

We ought not to enter upon so difficult and delicate a duty without forethought and prayer, that we may be guided by God's word and Christ's Spirit. It is not our judgment which we are to give our fellow-sinners, but that of God; and we should ask them to receive our advice only upon the authority of Him "whose we are and whom we serve." We must consider the temperament of him to whom we would speak, and gain upon him by gradual advances, not startling vehemence. A physician of the body would adapt his remedies to the constitution of his patient: why should not we, who seek to medicine the soul? We must consider the time; not pressing upon our brother, when his attention is necessarily distracted, but if possible, when his ears and heart are prepared to listen with some calm-

ness; nor, except in rare cases, or on occasions manifestly requiring it, before others, for that is an impertinent parade of his faults and our zeal, likely to provoke his resentment. There is great wisdom in the scriptural rule, to tell another of his errors in private, "*between him and thee.*" An honest courage will speak with the sinner alone, and not require the countenance of others.

Our exhortations should be very earnest. Our faithfulness to God should make us bold; our zeal for our fellow-sinner should make us determined, and justice to ourselves should make us frank. Reserve, concealment, cunning, are worse than useless; they deceive; and thus, being generally seen through, defeat our purpose, by destroying our influence. Next to meekness, frankness is the best virtue of a Christian when engaged in doing good. It is a matter of the highest concern that we speak of, the health of our fellow-sinner's soul, his usefulness to the world, and the glory of the Master; and, in such a case, not

to be earnest is not to be sincere. Our brother will respect us the more from seeing us bent upon his good, and the good of Christ's cause. Besides, as the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says, we are to "exhort one another *daily*, while it is called *to-day*;" and our exhortations will show their sincerity by their frequency; since every day brings fresh reason for urgency, and we have not a moment to lose, when there is so much to be done, so few to do it, the time so short to do it in, and that time so uncertain. To-morrow our tongues may be silent, or the ear of our fellow-sinner cold in the grave. *To-day*, is the only time of which we are sure; let us then crowd it with the most strenuous efforts to save the souls of all we can from the fires of eternal ruin.

"Great God! on what a feeble thread
Hang everlasting things!"

Such is the exhortation of the true penitent to his fellow-men. Such, my reader, be yours; and

when the day comes in which the author of this book, and those who read its simple but honest pages, must stand before God, to render our account, may each of us be permitted to present many souls, won by our instrumentality for the glory of Him, who has bought us with his own blood, that we might be his own peculiar people, zealous in good works, and especially the best work of all, the recommendation of His gospel to our fellow-men, by open profession, a consistent life, and a godly conversation. Amen!

We have nearly reached the last page of our little work, having led you with the penitent from the depths of guilt, through conviction of sin, prayer for divine pardon, trust in the divine forgiveness, and expectation of divine favour, to the duties of a Christian life. Suffer a parting counsel:—Let us all resolve to seek first the kingdom of God; first in time, first in earnestness; the

kingdom of God in our own hearts, in the hearts of those we love, in the hearts of the world; and all we need for this life or the life to come, shall be added unto us.

LET THE PEOPLE PRAISE THEE, O GOD; LET ALL THE PEOPLE PRAISE THEE. THEN SHALL THE EARTH YIELD HER INCREASE. GOD SHALL BLESS US, AND ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH SHALL FEAR HIM!

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